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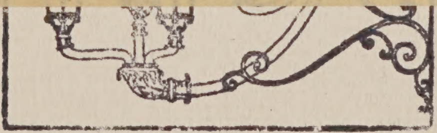

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Woodcock

From a water-color by Frank W. Benson

CLASSICS OF THE AMERICAN SHOOTING FIELD

A Mixed Bag for the Kindly Sportsman
1783–1926

EDITED BY
JOHN C. PHILLIPS
AND
LEWIS WEBB HILL, M.D.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY
FRANK W. BENSON

And other illustrations

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1930

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'The Warwick Woodlands,' and 'Tom Draw's Visit to Pine Brook.' Henry William Herbert ('Frank Forester'). Philadelphia, 1845.

'Canvas-back Shooting on Chesapeake Bay.' *Krider's Sporting Anecdotes,* by John Krider. Philadelphia, 1853.

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INTRODUCTION

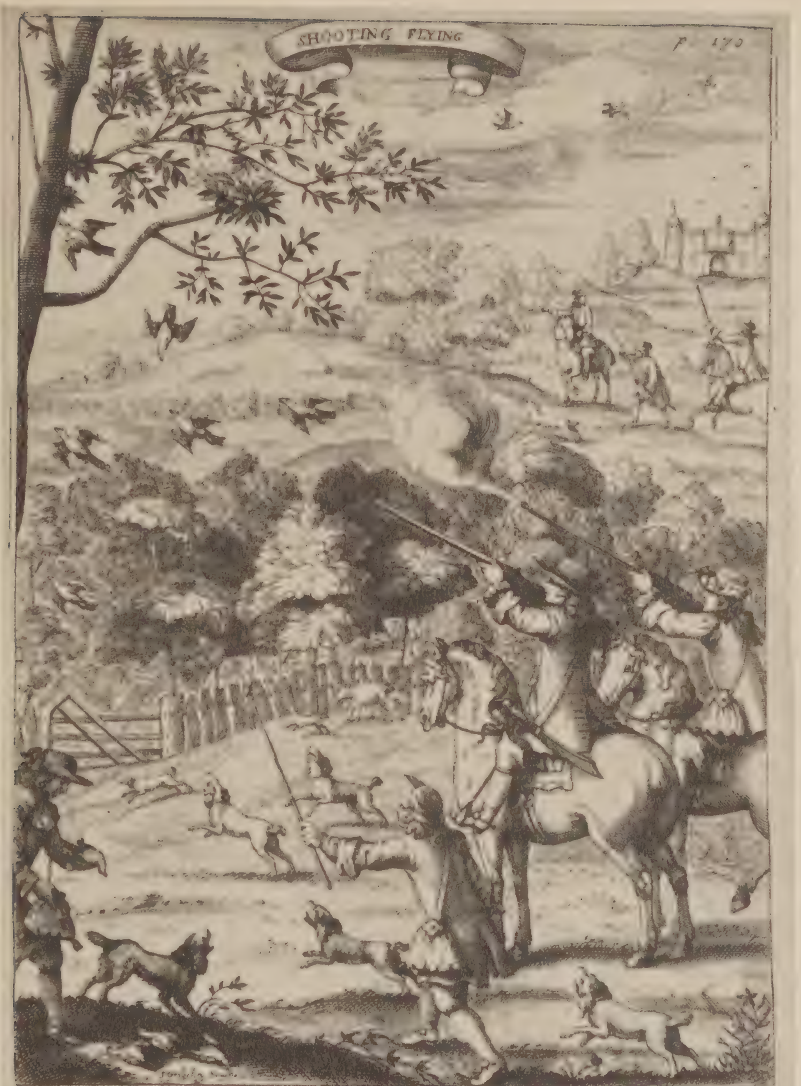
The literary quality of books and short sketches dealing with shooting varies a great deal — many are simply textbooks without any pretensions to literary style, others are in narrative form, but are often poorly written and without especial interest. A few, however, have been written by men of real literary ability, and deserve to take rank with the best pastoral literature. In this volume we have brought together what we consider some of the best of the short sketches that have appeared in American shooting literature since its beginning. We have also thought that it might be of interest to include a brief résumé of the development of shooting literature in general, and a check-list, of most of the books that have been published in America dealing with shooting, from 1783 up to the present time.

English shooting literature is richer than American, for the English were following field sports in a scientific way, and writing about them, when most of this country was a wilderness. Then, again, most of the shooting in England was and is done by men of the leisured upper classes, who had the time, inclination, and ability to write about it. Shooting and the preserving of the game were taken very seriously. In this country, on the other hand, until comparatively recent years a man who devoted much time to field sports in a new land, where there was so much constructive work of all sorts to be done, was considered shiftless and a ne'er-do-well, and most of the shooting was done by backwoodsmen and market gunners.

The first English sporting book is generally believed to be the *Master of Game*, by Edward, Duke of York, written about 1413. This was in manuscript, the art of printing not having been yet invented, and was largely a translation, with some original additions, of a famous French work by Count Gaston de Foix, the *Livre de Chasse*, written about 1387.

The first printed English sporting book, printed in 1486 by Wynkyn de Worde, is a treatise by Dame Juliana Berners on *Hawking, Hunting, and the Blazing of Coat Armour*. There were facsimile reprints of this in 1810 and 1881. From 1500 to 1700 there were very few books on the chase in English, probably not more than half a dozen all told. After about 1700, when shooting birds on the wing began to be possible and popular, we may separate the books on shooting from those on 'the chase' in general. In the eighteenth century there were probably about twenty titles dealing with shooting, a good many of these being poems. Special attention was given at this period to the art of shooting on the wing, for previously guns had been so clumsy, and locks of such uncertain character, that accurate wing shooting was next to impossible. The first picture of wing shooting in an English book was in Blome's *Gentleman's Recreation*, published in 1683.

With the improvement of guns in the first part of the nineteenth century, largely due to the inventive ingenuity and superb workmanship of the master of all gunsmiths, Joseph


SHOOTING FLYING
p. 170
To the Honourable Thomas Fairfax Esqr eldest Son of ye
Rt Honble Henry Lord Fairfax of Denton in York shire.
This Plate is humbly Dedicated by Richard Blome.

SHOOTING FLYING
From Richard Blome's 'Gentleman's Recreation,' 1683

PUB

STALKING
p. 171
To the Hon.ble S.r Henry Goodricke of Ribston Parke
in Yorkeshire Knight & Bar.t his Majesties Envoy Extraor:
:dinary to the King of Spain. Anno Dom. 168
This Plate is humble dedicated by Richard Blome
Arthur Soly fecit

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STALKING

From Richard Blome's 'Gentleman's Recreation,' 1683

COMMENCEMENT OF A CRIPPLE CHASE
From Peter Hawker's 'Instructions to Young Sportsmen,' 1846

Manton, shooting became very popular and excellent books began to appear. The most famous of these, and indeed the best-known book on shooting in the English language, was Colonel Peter Hawker's *Instructions to Young Sportsmen.* First published in 1814, in a small edition as a modest volume to be given about among his friends, it immediately had a tremendous success, and between 1814 and 1859 went through no less than twelve editions, including an American one in 1846. A modern edition was published in 1922, edited by that accomplished writer on sporting subjects, Mr. Eric Parker, of *The Field.*

From the time of Hawker up to the present, many delightful books on shooting, and shooting combined with the natural history of game, have been published in England and these were often illustrated by accomplished artists, such as the Allens, Abraham Cooper, Charles Whymper, John G. Millais, and Archibald Thorburn.

The first book on shooting in this country was published in 1783, *The Sportsman's Companion.* The reproduction of the title-page is from a copy of the second edition (1791) in the Library of Congress, and there was a third edition in 1793. All are of the greatest rarity. As far as we know, there were no more books on shooting published in America until 1827, when *The American Shooter's Manual, by a Gentleman of Philadelphia County*, appeared. It is also rare, and it is very unusual to see it offered by any bookseller. It contains three excellent engravings of sporting scenes, two of which were pirated from T. B. Johnson's *Shooter's Companion*, published in England a few years before.

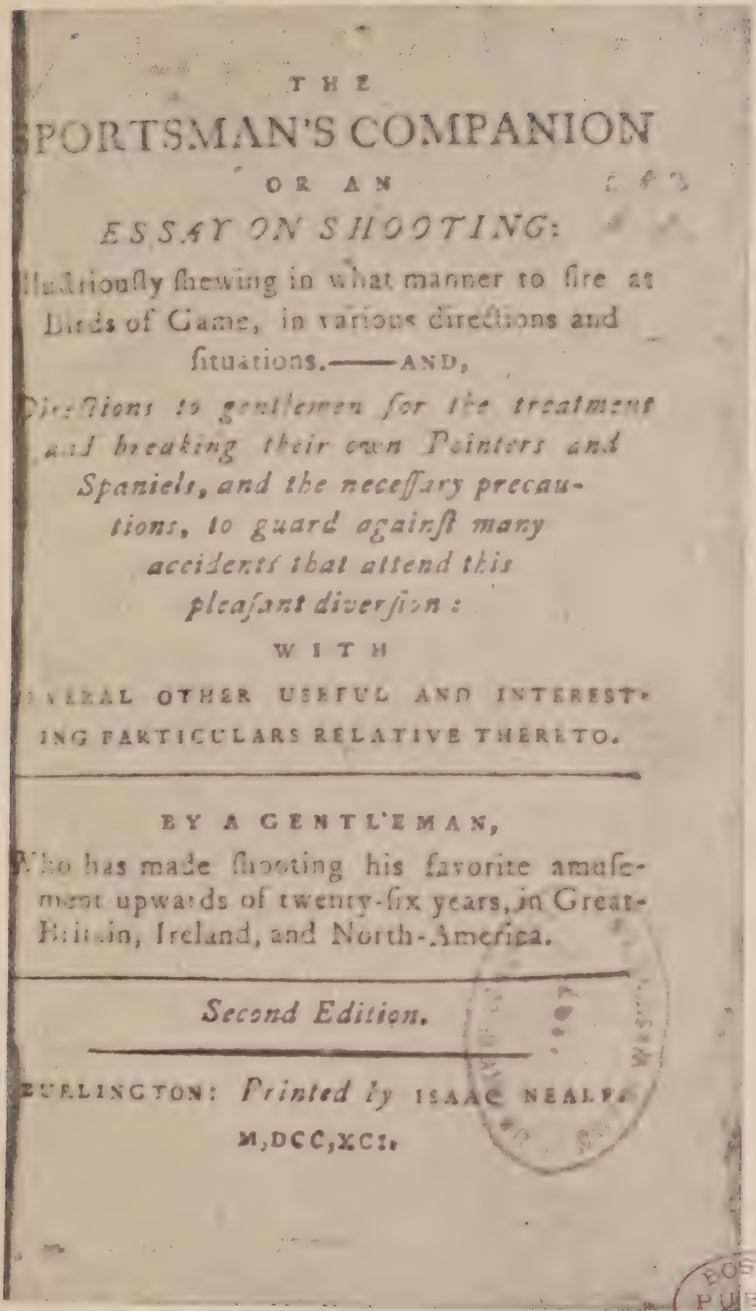
The most pretentious early American work on shooting is the *Cabinet of Natural History and American Rural Sports*, published in Philadelphia by I and T. Doughty in three volumes (1830–35). It consists of many short essays on sport and natural history by various authors, and contains many excellent colored lithographs, drawn on stone by Thomas Doughty.

Between 1832 and 1845 we can find only three books, *Essays on Various Subjects* (anonymous, 1835), Schreiner's *Sporting Manual* (1841), and Skinner's *The Dog and the Sportsman* (1845).

Probably the best-known name in American sporting literature is that of Henry William Herbert (Frank Forester). He was a well-born and well-educated Englishman, who came to this country in 1831, and settled on the outskirts of Newark, New Jersey. He was an accomplished scholar, and devoted himself for the next fifteen years to the editing of various magazines, and to the writing of historical novels, which enjoyed a considerable vogue. Although he was a skilled sportsman, and passionately devoted to shooting, he apparently never thought of writing on sporting subjects until 1845, when his first sporting book, *The Warwick Woodlands*, appeared. This had been previously published as a serial in the *American Turf Register*. Shortly after, *My Shooting Box* was published. In quick succession appeard *Field Sports of the United States and British Provinces of North America*, *The Deerstalkers*, *The Quorndon Hounds*, the *Young Sportsman's Manual*, and *American Game in its Seasons*. There are also a number of short sporting sketches by Forester in various magazines which were never published in book form, until some of them were collected by 'Will Wildwood' in a small volume called *Frank Forester's Fugitive Sporting Sketches*, in 1879.

All of Forester's sporting books now bring good prices, and some of them are rather difficult to obtain, especially *The Warwick Woodlands* and *My Shooting Box*, which are the most entertaining and most desirable from a collector's point of view. Forester was the first really capable American sporting writer; partly for this reason, and partly because his books possess a good deal of intrinsic merit, they will always be classics of American sporting literature.

After 1850, many books on shooting began to appear. *The American Sportsman*, by Elisha J. Lewis, M.D. (1856), is a large



THE

SPORTSMAN'S COMPANION

OR AN

ESSAY ON SHOOTING:

Illuſtriouſly ſhewing in what manner to fire at
Birds of Game, in various directions and
ſituations.——AND,

Directions to gentlemen for the treatment
and breaking their own Pointers and
Spaniels, and the neceſſary precau-
tions, to guard againſt many
accidents that attend this
pleaſant diverſion:

WITH

SEVERAL OTHER USEFUL AND INTEREST-
ING PARTICULARS RELATIVE THERETO.

BY A GENTLEMAN,

Who has made ſhooting his favorite amuſe-
ment upwards of twenty-ſix years, in Great-
Britain, Ireland, and North-America.

Second Edition.

BURLINGTON: *Printed by* ISAAC NEALE.
M,DCC,XCI.

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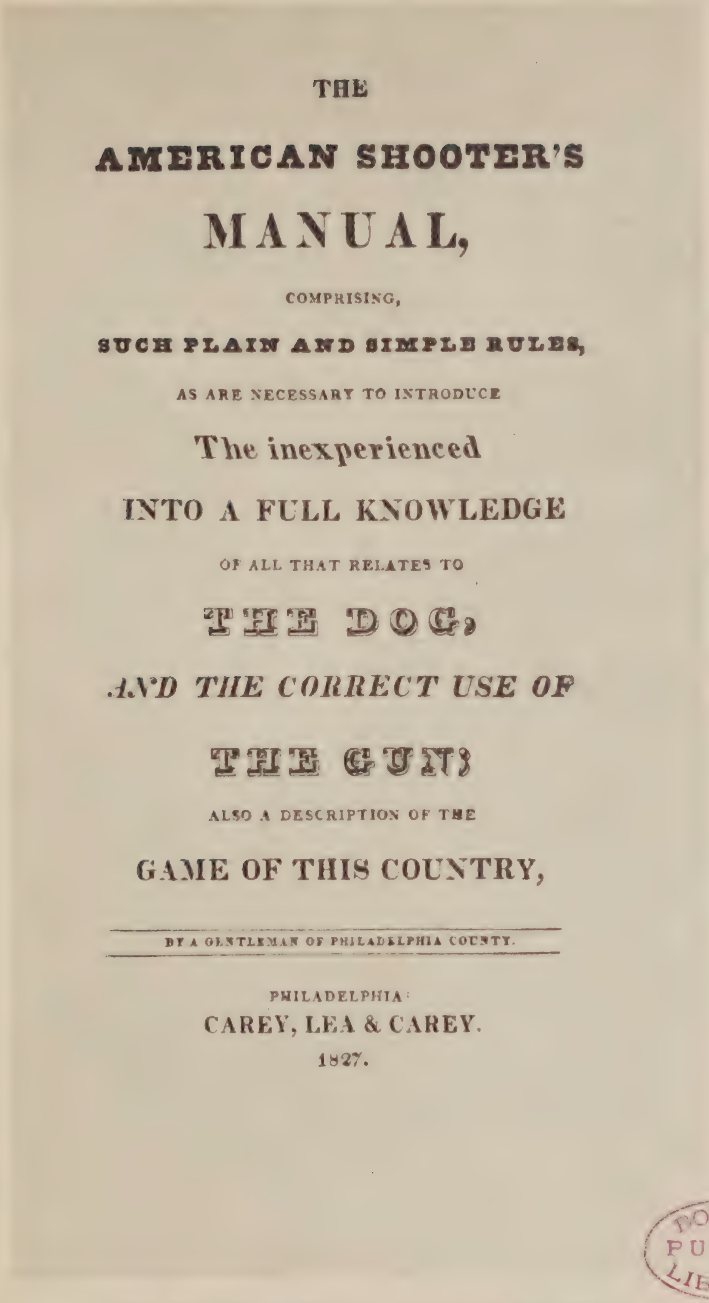
THE FIRST AMERICAN BOOK ON SHOOTING



THE

AMERICAN SHOOTER'S

MANUAL,

COMPRISING,

SUCH PLAIN AND SIMPLE RULES,

AS ARE NECESSARY TO INTRODUCE

The inexperienced

INTO A FULL KNOWLEDGE

OF ALL THAT RELATES TO

THE DOG,

AND THE CORRECT USE OF

THE GUN;

ALSO A DESCRIPTION OF THE

GAME OF THIS COUNTRY,

BY A GENTLEMAN OF PHILADELPHIA COUNTY.

PHILADELPHIA:
CAREY, LEA & CAREY.
1827.

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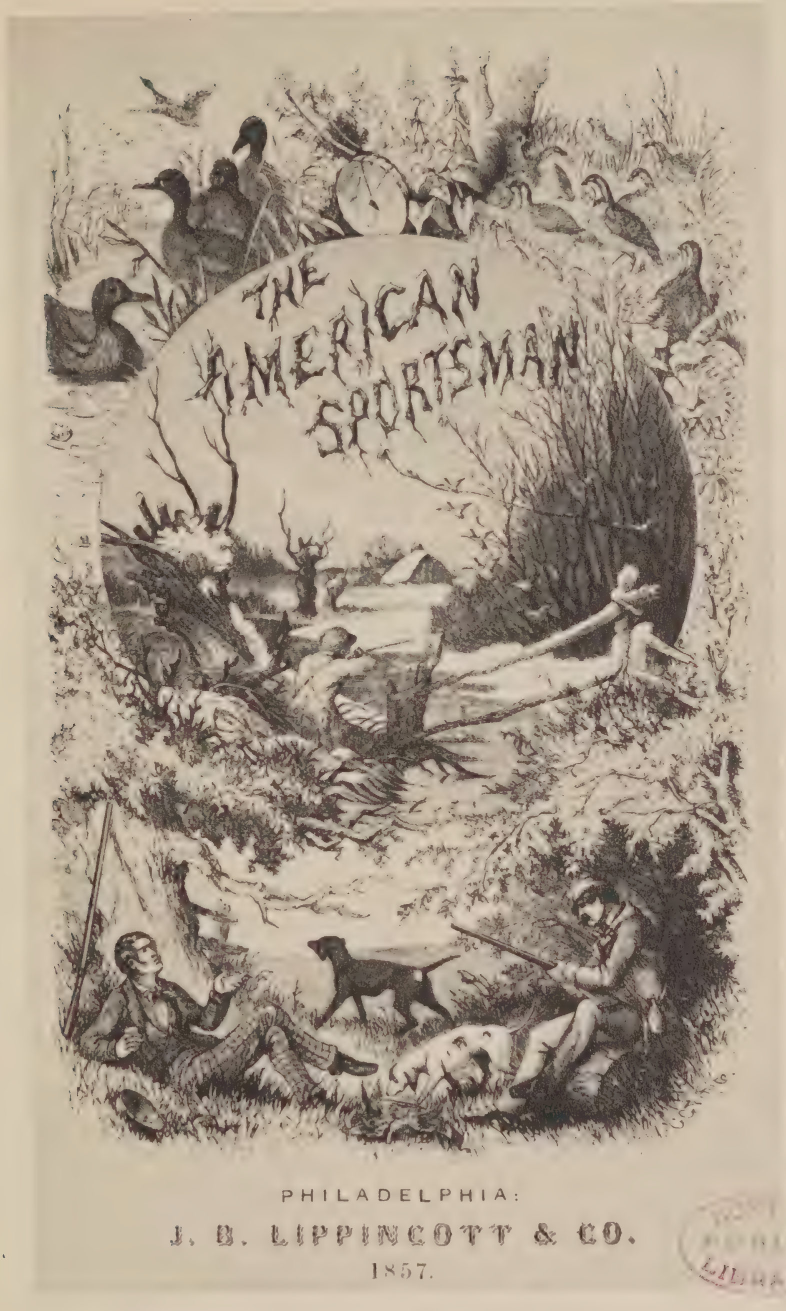
THE SECOND AMERICAN BOOK ON SHOOTING



THE
AMERICAN
SPORTSMAN

PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1857.

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DR. ELISHA J. LEWIS'S 'AMERICAN SPORTSMAN'

volume of over five hundred pages, full of valuable information on dogs, guns, and game birds, embellished with some very creditable woodcuts. It was a popular book for twenty years, went through several editions, and it is not very difficult to procure a good copy even now at a moderate price.

Bruce Leffingwell's two books, *Wildfowl Shooting* (1888) and *Shooting on Upland, Marsh and Stream* (1890); *American Duck Shooting* (1905) and *American Game Bird Shooting* (1905), by George Bird Grinnell; *Upland Game Birds*, by Sandys and Van Dyke; *The Waterfowl Family*, by Sanford, Bishop, and Van Dyke (1903); and *Our Feathered Game*, by Dwight Huntington (1903), are some of the best of the books of two or three decades ago.

At the present time perhaps the best-known American writers on shooting are Captain Paul Curtis, Mr. Charles Askins, Mr. Nash Buckingham, and Mr. Charles B. Morss. Mr. Curtis and Mr. Askins have written excellent textbooks on the shotgun and on methods of hunting, for instruction primarily. Mr. Buckingham and Mr. Morss have written many short sketches and stories dealing with shooting in the various sporting magazines.

CLASSICS OF THE AMERICAN SHOOTING FIELD

I

HEATH-HEN SHOOTING ON LONG ISLAND

Anonymous

1783

[This sketch is taken from the first American book on shooting, 'The Sportsman's Companion,' and is, so far as we know, the only detailed account ever published of shooting this practically extinct bird. The 'Royal Gazette' of New York, Saturday, April, 1783, says: 'The Sportsman's Companion, or An Essay on Shooting, is now ready for sale, at Messrs. Robertson's, Mill and Hicks, Queen Street, and No. 9 Cliff Street. Such as have subscribed to this work will please to send to the Gentlemen whose subscription lists they have signed, where they will find their respective numbers. As there are but few copies of the first edition unsold, such as want this book should make immediate application.']

Grouse, or Heath-Cock, may be justly deemed the sublimity of shooting, and it is much to be regretted that any should have access to this diversion, but such as are at least competent judges of so very Majestical an amusement.—You should therefore be provided with a brace of the best Pointers, of the fleet species, large and vigorous.

In Scotland and England for the moors, this kind of shooting is not so laborious for Dogs as it is in North America; the brushy plains on Long-Island, is the only place I have seen in that country abounding with Grouse, and it is pretty well known to many good sportsmen residing in New-York and Long-Island. As the cover on said plains is an under oak-wood, of a strong and thick brushy nature, it certainly requires the very best of Dogs, and it should be so contrived in your parties, to have always a fresh brace to hunt, for as your Dogs on that ground are obliged to gallop at a very high rate, and rise powerfully to the cover, they are soon fatigued; they ought to have a very large range, the cover being even and the ground extensive to a long view, admits of their going well out, and as they are supposed to be perfectly staunch, you run no risk of springing. Of many Pointers, that I have seen carried to this ground, who were deemed good ones in small shooting, few were, at least for the first two or three days, good for much. You should then, previous to the season for this game, keep your Dogs in good wind, by frequent exercise, and reducing their fat, by feeding them on meal and light diet; by this attention they will be rendered, in some measure, prepared for the great exercise that must ensue, and for which they would be very ill calculated, were they taken immediately from feeding on the run of the kitchen and street carrion. — I have seen tolerable good Dogs brought there, that never made out a bird in three or four days labour.

As for directions for finding this game, the plains are so very large and extensive that nothing but patience, perseverance, and labour, with the addition of guides that know their haunts, can endure success. — I should here avoid attempting to describe the several articles of conveniency, such as horses, chairs, provisions, liquors, etc. necessary for this diversion; it will be presumptive in me (who am but a stranger) to delineate them, they being much better known than I can explain them; yet if I was permitted to choose, I would make the

GOING OUT

From Scott's 'British Field Sports,' 1820

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following arrangement: — Suppose my party to consist of two Gentlemen, I would provide a single horse-chair (the horse should be accustomed to the firing of arms,) a Servant in the second chair, to carry the Dogs, (of which there should be two brace at the least) provisions, liquors, tea, sugar, etc. and spare powder and shot, etc. etc. etc. so that between the expenses of the Gentlemen, Servant, Horses, Dogs, etc. I may, within moderate bounds, allow three guineas per diem for the whole, to be a very moderate calculation for the expenses of this kind of amusement, exclusive of powder and shot.

Indian-meal porridge and milk is the common food you can get for the Dogs in that part of the country; it is light and wholesome; This and the exercise, soon reduces them to a proper condition for action — Several Gentlemen in and nigh New-York have excellent Dogs, but I cannot avoid giving the preference, to any that I ever saw, to one which, I believe was General Birch's; he had been some years in the possession of a man on the Plains who served as a Guide to Gentlemen when Grousing — he had reduced the Dog so low, that when I saw him first, he was a mere skeleton, I thought he could not stand upon his legs, but he soon convinced me to the contrary by ranging with admirable agility, and perfect staunchness; this I entirely imputed to his uncommon practice: — The Dog was so habituated to game (or rather over hunted) and kept so low, that he scarcely made any show when he came upon birds, and drew with seeming indifference; and if he happened far out at a point, he sat upon his backside until you came up to him — being as I thought too weak to stand in the attitude of pointing for any considerable time: He was red and white, and of a middling size. I think of the fleet species, though he was so low in flesh that I could form no just idea of his shape and make.

A pack of these birds will cover a considerable extent of ground in evenings and mornings, when dispersed and scattered about after food, that it very often happens after you have had several shots, may be from more than one point to the same pack, that some birds still remain on the ground, especially if they have not been much disturbed; — you should therefore allow your Dogs to make full ranges all round and back-hunt, what you take to be the utmost limits of the ground the pack occupied; — here the excellency of your Dogs are absolutely necessary, not only in picking up the remaining game, but also in being perfectly obedient and still after you fire, and not moving an inch whilst you are loading; they ought indeed to be very cool in general, particularly upon such occasions as the above; without this qualification in your Pointers, you will have the mortification of seeing the Grouse rise and fly in fair shots all round, when perhaps you have not a gun ready to fire, which will not in general be the case if the Dogs lay still, for in fine weather, the birds will not sometimes be easily got up. — I must here beg leave to quote an instance in support of the preceeding ideas, viz.

I was the first that took Mr. L——'s Bull-head (so called, having a short head like one of those animals, being of the Spanish kind) to the Plains, I think in the year 1778: He was made in England, was staunch, and of the best breed, was under good command, and seemed rather timid; it was the latter end of September: the Dog stood, but when I fired, Bull-head ran out and gave tongue at a great rate; I imputed this to his long sea-passage and want of practice; called him in, and only spoke harsh to him. — The second shot, he however behaved much worse than the first, and would not come in, but run after a whole pack of Grouse in single birds; yelped and barked without intermission. He continued this career for a whole day, and all my adress could not bring him in, and consequently spoilt the day's diversion.

The second day I gave him to our Guide, with a rope fastened from his collar to a bell tied about the man's waist. Upon my firing (being very strong) he brought the fellow down upon his face, and trailed him through the brush a great way, which exasperated our Guide so much, as to cut the rope and let him go. I saw no more of *Sancho*, only at a distance, for the rest of the day, and though we had another Dog, now lost the second day's sport, not being able to catch him.

Had he been my own I certainly would have shot him. Notwithstanding, Bull-head next season became one of the best Dogs I ever saw: He was by no means fleet, but held out well, and, I believe, all art would not induce him to move an inch from his point. It will seem (to those acquainted with this work) incredible to declare that, in 1781, I hunted him five days successfully on the Plains, and on the fifth day, he travelled to Brooklyne-Ferry, above forty miles. On this occasion he found more birds than General Birch's Dog, owing to his superior strength. L—— and myself lost him once in a brushy cover, Quail shooting at Bushwick; We called, shouted, and whistled for him very nigh half an hour, and no appearance of Sancho; at last I heard a faint howl, and, turning about, within three yards of my heels, there was poor Bull-head fixed at a dead point on a bevy. — He became mine afterwards, but falling down from a garrat, three stories high, he died of the bruise in a few days. To a Sportsman of fortune, he was worth forty pounds sterling.

I was once on the Brushy-Plains, Long-Island, in company with two Gentlemen, we fell in with a pack of Grouse, or Heath-hens, and had some shots; as we turned our backs, and were quitting the ground, I heard a bird rising behind me; I turned quickly about, and, notwithstanding it flew at a great distance, I covered him and fired; he immediately towered high in the air, and, after crossing a large wood at a considerable distance, disappeared. I insisted upon my hitting him, from his towering so very high: The other Gentlemen laughed, and said it was impossible from the distance I was at when I fired, that the bird was only frightened. I begged, however, that they would stay for me, and that I would go back after him, and convince myself, if possible. — I took a boy that saw the bird's flight, and one of the Dogs, and after going nigh half a mile, and through a large piece of wood, the Dog found my bird under our feet, lying stone dead upon his back. I came back with him in great triumph, shewing him to the company, but on examining could not find any marks of shot; this renewed the laugh against me; but the bird being quite warm, I was fully convinced it was the same I fired at: — We brought it to our rendezvous, and plucked him with the utmost care, but could find no impression of shot; at last, after many searches, I discovered that a single grain of shot had carried the end of a pin-feather through the spine, and the other end in the mouth of the wound, which prevented our seeing it before. — There must, undoubtedly, be many escapes of this nature, in the case of body wounds; For Grouse, Partridge and Quail, will carry a great quantity of shot, and fly strong and far, when you don't touch their wings, even if you break their legs.

II

CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE SPORTSMAN

T. Doughty

1830

A TRUE Sportsman always respects the rules and seasons for shooting, and most heartily despises the man who destroys the unfledged brood, or the protectors which Nature has provided for them.

He is provided with every article necessary for his excursions, without borrowing from his neighbour, or eternally boring his friends for their guns, dogs, or horses.

In his general exterior, he appears neat, clean, and properly accoutred. His dogs are mannerly, because, by discipline, they are restrained to proper limits, and, when he visits a distant friend, these dogs avoid running into parlours, chambers, or stealing viands from the kitchen fire. They hunt properly, and require no noise, because he has instructed them in the fundamental principles of hunting.

He neither curses at, nor abuses his dogs, but, when necessary, chastises them in cool blood, because *good breeding* has taught him the fallacy of swearing at a dumb brute; or venting his passion on another, when the fault too commonly springs from other sources.

To his dogs he is merciful and provident; he consults their comfort, and, if he will draw recreation from their services, he repays them by humanity.

In the field his demeanour is correct, and free from impetuosity; deliberation marks all his actions, and his experience is never chargeable with carelessness, or danger, to his companions; to the more inexperienced who accompany him he is kind, and willing to confer knowledge; to contribute to their pleasure by giving many opportunities to shoot, without *greedily* embracing them himself, for the sake of bagging game. When the dogs point, he does not rush up to the game before his companions are near, and take the first, and, perhaps, the only chance of shooting. If a bird is killed in a joint shot, with a companion, he is cautious not to claim it, but will yield it with pleasure, rather than excite unpleasant feelings, or engender strife.

He is satisfied with a moderate quantity of game, and is not ambitious to destroy life, for the sake of making a parade of his success; and, when asked, he gives a faithful account of the number killed, and is unwilling to reap the name of a *good shot*, or *great Sportsman*, at the expense of truth, by exaggerating his difficulties, or the account of game killed, to double of what is the reality.

Although lively and communicative in company with other Sportsmen, he does not boast of his actions, nor his ability to excel his neighbour; neither does he brag of his exploits, nor undervalue his friend's adeptness, for the purpose of enhancing his own good name. He hears the abilities of others praised without envy, or ridiculing their exploits, or offering a bet, (accompanied by an oath,) that himself is superior. The consciousness of his own qualifications does not make him vain and boastful; he is liberal to those he employs, and a stranger to meanness of principle and action; he avoids

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WOODCOCK SHOOTING

From a lithograph by T. Doughty in 'Cabinet of Natural History and Rural Sports,' Philadelphia, 1832

injury to the farmer's crops, and never adds insult where injury has been unavoidably caused by him or his dogs.

He will not waste time or life, by shooting useless birds, merely to gratify vanity, by showing how well he can shoot.

If he drinks spirituous liquors during his excursions, he does it moderately, so that he may, by its inebriating effects, neither endanger his friends, nor disgrace their company.

Should he borrow from his friend a dog or gun, he will not send the one home in a starving condition, nor the other broken, dirty, and unfit for use.

If he makes an appointment, he is strict to accomplish it, and does not waste his time in bed hours after the period to meet his companion has elapsed.

Unless a man is more or less governed by the above, he cannot lay claim to those principles which constitute a correct Sportsman.

III

SPORTSMEN

Anonymous

1835

For my own convenience, I shall define the term 'Sportsman' to mean 'any person who hunts for the purpose of catching or killing it, any kind of creature: Fleas, and other such "small deer," always excepted.' Under the comprehensive signification of this new definition, I am enabled to form three distinct classes of sportsmen, with the following titles, viz: — the vagabond sportsman; the dandy sportsman; and the true sportsman. I commence with the first class, and, in imitation of Midas, say, 'Pan, take the lead.'

The vagabond sportsman belongs to a pretty numerous class of men, residing in the purlieus of large towns and cities; although now and then he may be detected in the ranks of the dandy class, but never in that of the true sportsman. Take a sketch of two worthies belonging to this class purchasing a four dollar fowling piece, in the store of those well-known caterers for the sporting world, Messrs. Cooper and Moore. One of the fellows dressed in a long drab coat and old white hat, walking up to the counter, where the last-named gentleman is engaged with a respectable-looking person, says, 'Well, boss, I guess I'll look at that are gun agin.' With his customary urbanity the storekeeper respectfully inclines his head, and answers, 'Very well, sir.' The gun which he had examined in the morning is then handed to him again: he takes hold of it with his right hand; tries its weight and balance; raises it to his shoulder, and looks knowingly along the barrel; he then, bringing it down to the priming position, pulls back the hammer, and listens to the dull sound of the sear and tumbler, as the one falls sluggishly into the other; leaving it at full cock, he then drops the butt upon the floor, like one of the awkward squad at a militia training when trying to 'order arms'; after this he puts one of his fingers into the muzzle to determine its calibre and internal finish: and in the last place rubs his hand along the barrel from the sight to the breech, as though he was anxious to smooth down the nap.

When this examination is over, with a diffidence in his own judgement worthy of all imitation, he says to his companion, 'What do you think of this ere tool, Bill?' Bill, who, wrapped up in a pea jacket, coarse muffler, and hairy cap, has been watching the motions of his friend for the last five minutes, answers in a tone of voice resembling that of a clam-boy with a sore throat, 'How the h—— should I know? I never buyed a gun in my life. You ought to know the wally on it yourself, Sam.' Then, turning to the storekeeper, Sam says, 'Can't you take no less than four dollars for this ere gun? It's a rough made un.' And receives for answer, 'No, sir. That is the very lowest; and it is a very cheap gun, too. A few years ago we got ten dollars for the very same article; and although we have guns rather finer finished than that, I have no doubt you will find it shoots well; which is everything in a gun where it is not wanted more for show than for use.' Sam, 'shut up' by this commercial logic, turns again to Bill, and in a subdued tone observes, 'I b'lieve I've got only three; just lend me a dollar.' Bill, after a moment's hesitation, fumbles in his vest pocket, and draws forth a dirty dollar bill, which he passes to Sam, saying in a low grumbling tone, 'I shall want that to-morrow,' to which Sam replies, rather indignantly in consequence of the implied suspicion of his friend, 'I understand — all right, honour bright! by G——d!' The 'tool' is then paid for, and the 'brothers in arms' leave the store. When they get into the street, Sam observes to Bill, 'She looks like a tarnal good un, s'pose we go to Brooklyn and try her.' Bill says 'Agreed'; and the pair, immediately turning down Fulton Street, go on their way, and are no more seen — by us.

The vagabond sportsman is a fellow of no principle; and if he hunts with a dog, has either borrowed or stolen it. He has no regard for seasons, poaches every kind of game, and in his marauding excursions hesitates not to bag poultry; making no distinction between a barn-door pheasant and a partridge; and considering a sucking pig a prime substitute for a raccoon. He shoots at chickens on Christmas and New Year's days, passing off counterfeit money among the boys who set them up. On the pigeon-ground he fires at a bird missed from the trap just as it is falling from the gun of another out-shooter, and claims it with the ferocity of a savage, in the language of a blackguard: he also steals all the pigeons he can lay his hands on, and pocket handkerchiefs become scarce among the company. Under these circumstances the vagabond sportsman seldom returns to town without a 'mess'; and not often without getting drunk. In this situation, at some low porter house, he swaggers loud — swears d——n his eyes, he can out-shoot any man in the country — will bet he can, by G—— ! — gets into a quarrel, perhaps fights; in the mean time, by a species of legerdemain, perfectly understood by his associates, all his game disappears; and after farther altercation occasioned by this circumstance, he staggers home at midnight to bed — and there we leave him.

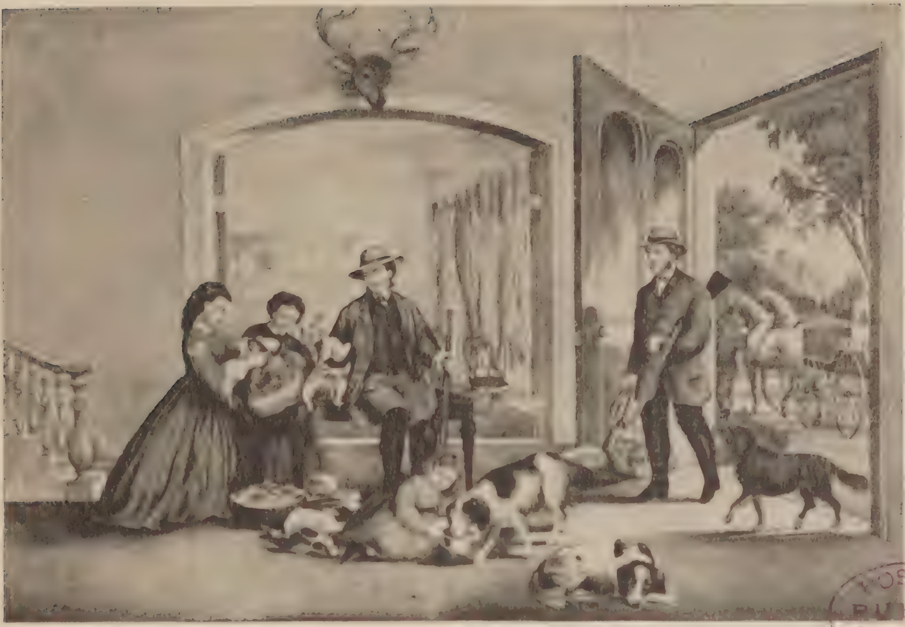
The dandy sportsman is a gentleman *par excellence* of the first water: and is particularly *nice* about everything. He must have a *complete* set of shooting apparatus; and nothing named in the gunsmith's vocabulary can be omitted from his collection; he is consequently an excellent customer to the venders of sporting wares, who have always some new *patent* article to show him, which they have imported with special reference to his use. His gun must be the best, or at least the highest priced article in the market; mounted with silver, and a genuine Westley Richards. His shooting jacket is made of superfine cloth, his dogs all imported, or *said* to be, and, like his clothes, of the most fashionable colour. He sets out upon a gunning excursion as though he were going to a dinner party; his garments all brushed up, and his boots polished with the real *Gosling* blacking, for which he has a very natural affection.

The dandy sportsman has also a very neat, modern-made wagon; quite pretty to look at, and exceedingly *inconvenient* for gunning purposes. It is a pleasure wagon; and the same vehicle which his person adorns in a drive to Cato's, excites the admiration of the connoisseurs on the road to Pine Brook. He lets his dogs run; partly because he is unable to carry them in his toy conveyance, and partly to show that he is a genuine sportsman. — He always drives fast, but patronizes taverns on the route from ostentation: talks 'big things' to the landlord: tells him the price of his gun — the pedigree of his dogs — and how much less than three minutes his horse can do a mile in; shows his diamond breast-pin that cost two hundred dollars, to excite the admiration of the host's pretty daughter who has just stepped out of a little back room to take a view of the fine-looking sportsman.

He then inquires what kind of shooting is to be had in that neighbourhood? Asserts his firm belief that himself and friend (another biped of the same genus at his elbow) could thin it off pretty well in a day or two. Tells how many woodcock, or snipe, he has killed in one day; and affirms it to be utterly beneath the character of a real sportsman to kill any kind of game, not even a flying squirrel, except on the wing. The landlord, perhaps an old thorough-going sportsman, listens quietly to all this fudge from his customer, being used to it, from the fashionable green-horns who stop at his house: and affects an astonishment he never felt since he was a child, that it should be possible for any man to shoot a partridge flying; which the dandy sportsman has just told him he can do every time. Finally, the gold lepine is drawn out; it is time to be off — a bank bill is thrown down, and the change pocketed without examination — an expressive look is then cast at the girl, and he departs, with the full persuasion that he has left a favourable impression on both members of the family; while the old man chuckles as they drive off — 'A precious pair of puppies!' — and the daughter, whose blooming countenance expresses a slight feeling of contempt, flopping her healthy-looking red elbows on the counter, says, 'Why — lord, father, that fellow, with all his jewellery, is no gentleman!'

The dandy sportsman, of course, knows little or nothing of the practical part of hunting; the smattering of information obtained from books, and the conversation of kindred geniuses, is, therefore, of no use to him in the field; and the terms 'Hie on!' 'Take heed!' 'To ho!' which he is constantly shouting to his canine companions, although as good words as any to be found in the 'Sportsman's Dictionary,' are only calculated, by his indiscriminate use of them, to disturb the game and distract his dogs.

In passing over lots, the dandy sportsman never closes a gate, or replaces a bar; always hunts on the outside of a cover or swamp; because scratches and mud would disfigure both his person and dress. Seldom, therefore, does he shoot much; but at the end of the campaign he procures with his purse what he never would with his gun, and fills his bag from the



HOME FROM THE WOODS
From a lithograph by Currier & Ives, 1867

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stores of neighbouring gunners, who regularly keep game on hand for the accommodation of the 'would be's'; the farmers' boys thus finding a profitable *home market* for the produce of their afternoon rambles.

On the old principle of 'the more the merrier' — the dandy sportsman prefers hunting in company; and a group of these ladylike gentlemen may sometimes be seen rushing up to a *point* in nearly solid column: in which case, when the game rises, it can only be by a special interference of Divine Providence that some of the party are not shot. Having several in company is also very convenient, when staying in the country, for a little *ante* in the evening, for which purpose a pack of cards is always put into the pocket with the powder flask, and the dandy, who is emphatically a man of pleasure, is thus enabled to recruit his spirits, exhausted by the fatiguing operations of the day's sport. Under the influence of brag and champaigne he boasts of the feats already performed, and binds himself to eclipse them by the performance of the morrow: till, at length, having drank himself into the same situation as the vagabond sportsman, with the difference only of more gentlemanly potations, he retires to his dormitory, where he dreams of being at once the idol of the female world, and the *astounder* (as in fact he is) of all crack sportsmen.

The true sportsman is confined to no particular rank in society, but may be found in the lowest as well as in the highest circles. He hunts, not, like the vagabond, because he is averse to all regular employment; nor, like the dandy, because he wishes to be fashionable; but because he has an innate, and ardent love of healthful exercise, and, the most exhilarating of all amusements, the sports of the field.

The true sportsman is, in all essential points, a philosopher — temperate, cool, calculating and observing. He possesses a sound mind and a sound body. The same discriminating judgement which he exhibits in the ordinary affairs of life, he carries with him into the field; and is guided more by his own experience than the information or opinions of others — he can bear fatigue without complaining, and endure privations without fainting under them.

He studies utility in everything; and, although economical with regard to superfluities, is free with his money for all proper expenses. He carries as good a gun as his circumstances enable him to procure; and when once satisfied with its shooting, experiences no childish wish to exchange it for one of a higher price, or a more fashionably made article. He requires no tinselled ornaments to please his eye: but sound barrels, fine locks, and correct shooting, are indispensable; and when these qualities of a good gun are combined in the instrument he uses, the plainer the *furniture* is, the better.

His gunning wagon (when rich enough to own one) is large and commodious; calculated to carry himself and companion comfortably; with plenty of room for dogs, guns, baggage, and game; his horse strong and steady; and the whole establishment so contrived as to leave but little chance, even on the roughest roads, for a *break-down.*

His dogs are selected, like a good race-horse, for their blood and bone, the excellence of their nose, and general sagacity, with but little regard to either size or colour; and he takes particular care to have them well trained. When he breeds from them, it is only to preserve the stock; not, avariciously, to make money by their whelps; nor, with foolish prodigality, to inundate the country with pointers and setters.

He seldom takes his dogs from home, unless for the purpose of hunting; and is careful on all other occasions to have them kept close: he is, therefore, never to be seen with two or three *canine compounds* dangling at his heels; or detected taking them into company, to the annoyance of all decent housewives.

His gunning dress is adapted to the season; and the fashion of it such as experience has taught him to be the most pleasant and convenient.

On hunting excursions the true sportsman is almost always successful; for the same reason that would ensure him success in any other undertaking — *he does nothing at random* — but can always give a satisfactory explanation, why he hunts one piece of ground on any given day, rather than another, on which abundance of game may have been seen, a week, a fortnight, or a month before; and this, by-the-by, is what no *green* sportsman can do. He is always to be seen hunting in the right place, according, not only to the season, but to the peculiar state of the weather, and the hour of the day: and does not, like the town-bred gunner, beat stubbles for woodcock, or traverse barren mountains for quail. He keeps well up to his dogs, except in a very open country; leaves a good deal to their instinct, and makes no unnecessary noise in hunting them. When the game is pointed, he does not run himself out of breath to get ahead of his companion, but walks coolly up to his dogs; and when the birds spring, singles out his victim with deliberate and *deadly* precision. In short, he understands his business thoroughly, and follows it like a workman.

The true sportsman, when he has killed a bird, does not tumble it carelessly into his pocket, or game-bag, but not infrequently devotes a moment to admire the beauties of its plumage, which, in accordance with the suggestions of good taste, he endeavours to preserve unruffled.

Another characteristic of the subject of this sketch, consists in his wasting no time. If accidentally separated from his comrade, he does not sit for hours on a fence waiting his return, but hunts independently, and kills what he can. Neither does he loiter about a tavern, or spend the most suitable part of the day, for shooting, over a set dinner and a bottle of wine.

When called to by an angry farmer on whose land he may be trespassing, he does not run away, like the vagabond, nor return expostulation with insolence, like the dandy, but walking quietly up to him, listens respectfully to all he has to say; affording the owner of the soil a fair opportunity to talk down his irritation: and when he perceives that he has become satisfied with his own eloquence, and that his feelings are in some measure subdued, in a conciliatory, yet manly manner, he states his own case; and nine times out of ten, not only satisfies the farmer, that having a proper respect for the 'Rights of Man,' he wishes to infringe no law, nor injure any one's property: but gains his good will and a hearty invitation to the house, with full permission to hunt over his estate whenever he may think proper.

He is punctual in keeping his appointments for hunting excursions, candid in reporting his gunning ground and success, or in refusing such information — does not equivocate, or deceive with a cock and a bull story. He is no vain boaster; but as willing to give credit to others for skill as to receive it himself. On the termination of a day's shooting he attends, first to his dogs, secondly to his gun, and lastly to himself. Eats his supper with a good appetite, and retires early to bed.

When the true sportsman returns from a successful gunning trip, he does not devour all his game in the selfish solitude of his own family, but either distributes a portion of it with judicious liberality among his friends, or invites them to his hospitable mansion, where

> 'The table groans with costly piles of food,'

to participate with him in one of the agreeable results of his favourite pastime.

'Let us,' now, to use the language of the inspired owner of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, 'hear the conclusion of the whole matter'; which is — that although the *portrait* of a true sportsman (roughly sketched even as this is, by a self-taught artist) excites our admiration, it must be confessed that in the degenerate days of eighteen hundred and thirty-four, the *original*, like the *roc* of Sinbad the sailor, is somewhat a 'rara avis in terra.'

IV

A DISCOURSE AGAINST LAZINESS IN SPORTSMEN

Anonymous

1835

'The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting.'

As I do not suppose that you, my fellow sportsmen, are overburthened with clerical lore, my using the above quotation will not, I trust, be deemed an attempt to pour wine into an overflowing vessel, but the most superficial reader cannot but be struck with astonishment at the vast variety of knowledge brought forward in aid of the Jewish theology. Not only were the arts and sciences used to impart its axioms: nature, in all her phenomena, gentle, beautiful, terrific and sublime, summoned to enforce a law — but the habits, practices, and characters of all classes of men were referred to, to sanction, or illustrate, an important moral principle. Thus, Solomon, in censuring the vice of laziness, commending, by implication, the virtue of industry, has condescended to illustrate his position by adverting to that unpretending class of society, to which *we* belong; and tells us in his proverbs, that 'The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in *hunting*.' Now, although, it is not demonstrable that the King of Israel ever followed the hounds, it is highly probable that he understood the theory of hunting as practiced in *his* time, and it is perfectly clear by this passage that he well knew the difference in the *characters* of sportsmen: which are pretty similar in *all* times.

It will be my endeavor on this occasion to explain the full meaning of this passage, which may appear to some of you a very easy task; and you may, perhaps, think that the words of this sentence convey the meaning of the writer of them so clearly as to render all explanations superfluous: before we have done with the subject, I am strongly impressed with the notion that you will be of a very different opinion. There is *marrow* in this text, and we shall endeavor to extract it with the spoon of discretion.

In the first place, we notice in it the antiquity of our pastime.

In the second, learn something of the ancient mode of cooking.

And in the third, find in it a beautiful moral lesson, for the careless and indolent sportsman to chew the cud of reflection upon; and let us hope that, when he has so done, the digestion of it may be highly beneficial to his moral health.

In the first place we are to notice the antiquity of our pastime, viz. that of hunting. There can be no doubt from what we know of the manner of life among modern savages, that hunting, for the purpose of procuring food, was nearly coeval with the origin of mankind. It does not, however, appear that Adam and Eve required any other sustenance than what they derived from the fruits with which the garden of Eden was so abundantly supplied: the net, the springe, the lasso, the arrow and the spear, we may therefore safely conclude were instruments altogether unknown to our first parents.

Cain and Abel were furnished with the means of supporting life by cultivating the soil and raising cattle; though, for anything that appears to the contrary, the former might have

THE RABBIT HUNTER
From a lithograph by Kellogg

hunted; inasmuch as he was influenced by cruelty and hard-heartedness — qualities of mind, which, it must be conceded, form component parts of the character of all hunters.

The first hunter of whom we have any authentic account is that celebrated sportsman, Nimrod; who lived more than four thousand years ago, and who hunted, not only birds, and such harmless quadrupeds as rabbits, hares, and squirrels, but found amusement in destroying the wild beasts of the forest; and whose success in running down the human race enabled him to extend his power over a large tract of country; and in the end, to found the mighty Assyrian empire. If it would not be considered invidious we might here draw a comparison between the father of hunting, and his degenerate sons of our own days.

To what purpose, fellow sportsmen, do *you* hunt? Is it to obtain the means of living? No. Is it to increase your influence among your fellows for any useful purpose? No. Is it to conquer mankind, and to found empires, kingdoms, colonies, or even towns? No. For what then *do* you take the trouble to break dogs; to hire carriages; to consume time; in order that you may shoot a few harmless snipe, woodcock, or quail? I will tell you: and let not the truth, I beseech you, give offence. It is with most of you from *foolish vanity*, or from *idle habit*. Contend not against this assertion: I know all that *you* can urge against it; and, perhaps more. When you succeed in shooting game (which you know is not always the case), what do you do with it? Do you take it to market, and thereby make an honest penny, to indemnify you for your time and the expenses of your gunning excursion? I believe not: but, on the contrary, to show what you are pleased to call the liberality of your dispositions, you not uncommonly give the greater portion of it away among your acquaintances and friends. This is hunting to but little purpose — and I just perceive that the mention of it is a slight deviation from my main object.

It would be an easy matter to trace the history of hunting from the time of Nimrod to that of Peter, who, it is well known, both hunted and fished for the *souls of men;* but time flies, and I am hereby admonished to proceed to the second part of our subject, namely, the ancient mode of cooking. On this point our information is neither very full nor very clear; but we shall endeavor to explain it with the assistance of such lights as we possess. It appears certain, from the directions given to the Israelites by their earliest teachers (added to some domestic anecdotes of that people), that there were in those days but three modes of preparing food for the table: Roasting (or baking), boiling, and stewing. At this period of the world, a patent cooking apparatus was unknown; as were likewise patent recipes for dressing victuals. Mrs. Glass, Dr. Kitchener, and Professor Ude, were beings whose existence the Jewish prophets could not anticipate, and consequently never foretold. These people did not rack their invention, like the modern French cooks, to disguise a bird or a beast, a fish or a frog, so as to present it at table on a dozen different dishes, distinguished by as many names; much less had they arrived at that pitch of culinary refinement which enabled them to cook the eggs of the domestic hen 'six hundred and eighty-five ways.' In all things excepting their religion, they were a plain people; frugal, industrious, and persevering, as is proved by their wandering for forty years in the wilderness, until they succeeded in gaining the promised land; and although some of the tribes occasionally exhibited a rebellious spirit, and acted with cruelty and fraud towards the people of surrounding nations, it is gratifying to know that their *good qualities only* have been transmitted to their posterity; and that the modern descendants of Abraham are everywhere esteemed for their straight-forward singleness of purpose, and unimpeachable integrity in all matters of sale, barter, or exchange.

Let us now consider what was meant by 'the slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting.' Are we to infer that roasting was a process of cooking game among the ancient Jews so much more troublesome than either boiling or stewing, that the indolent hunter would not adopt it? Shall we conclude that he preferred boiling, or stewing, on account of its greater simplicity, and requiring less care? I think not. It appears to me that the reference is not to *any* mode of cooking, but to the general character of 'the slothful man'; and that our text may, without injustice to the intention of the writer, be paraphrased thus. 'The indolent sportsman, although mostly a great *gourmand*, seldom feasts on game *of his own killing*.' Here we perceive a very beautiful illustration of the identity, uniformity, and unchangeableness of the human character, in all parts of the world, and through every period of time. Laziness is a vice inherent in man, and may be found infecting every class; shame! that it has not been eradicated from ours. This consideration brings us to the last division of our subject, the moral lesson which it furnishes to the careless and indolent sportsman. Let us draw the picture of this man. He is constitutionally lazy; his whole system is relaxed, and every fibre spongy; his nerves possess no elasticity, and there is no decision in his mind; he is a great procrastinator, and can see quicker than others 'a lion in his path'; when roused for the moment by the exhilarating description of expected sport, given by some brother hunter, in the excited state of his feeling he promises to start at daylight the next morning on a shooting expedition; but the moment the exciting cause is removed his usual lassitude overtakes him, and he discovers insurmountable obstacles to the fulfillment of his engagement — he cannot go! Again ——

Look at that equipage. A horse, wagon, driver, dog and gun. It is the active, punctual and persevering sportsman going out; see, he stops in front of a handsome brick house, which exhibits no sign of containing one living thing. It is six o'clock, and the shutters are closed, the blinds down; and not a wreath of smoke is to be seen curling up from even the kitchen chimney. This is the dwelling of the slothful hunter. Behold his friend leap lightly from his wagon, ring the bell sharply, knock at the door with impatient violence, shout up towards his dormitory window as though giving an alarm of fire, but no one answers. Vexed, and weary of the ungrateful occupation, he turns to go away; at this moment, see the casement slowly raised, and the sluggard, putting forth his head, asks with a sleepy drawl (being totally oblivious of his appointment), 'W-o-o-'s the-r-e?' Listen to the answer of his friend: 'Why, what the devil! have you forgotten that we are going to Long Island? Are you not ready?' Observe the slothful man. He just begins to recollect himself, and answers: 'Yes, I'm re-a-dy'; — to which you see his night-cap gives the lie. Now he is down stairs, his breakfast is to be prepared; his gun to be cleaned; his dog to be looked for in the street; and ammunition to be procured at the hard-ware store; till, at last, he is 'ready' to start when he ought to be upon the ground; and crawls listlessly into the carriage, accompanied by the reproving sarcasms of his more active and wide-awake companion.

This sketch of the 'slothful man' I think you must recognize as correct, and my only fear is lest it should resemble any one of you. *Is* this the case? Reflect, I beseech you, a few moments, and compare your conduct as sportsmen with that described as being characteristic of the idle, careless, procrastinating, hunter.

Let me exhort you to examine yourselves with the severity of hostile critics; with the impartiality of philosophers; and, above all, with the spirit of candor and humility of true christians.

If in the course of such an investigation you should discover that you are in the practice, while seated comfortably in your arm chairs by your fire sides, of talking largely about your extraordinary hunting feats, while conscience tells you that you seldom go from home; if you detect yourselves in boasting of the immense distance you can travel in a day (I mean not in a wagon, but on foot) in pursuit of game, when you know you seldom walk a mile — if you can recollect several instances in which you have failed to keep your appointments with punctuality, or any in which you have not kept them at all, from not having resolution to exchange the comparatively impure atmosphere of your own chamber, for the bracing air of the mountain or the plain — if you can call to mind any occasion when you have remained for hours seated in a wagon by the road side, while your companion was industriously traversing woods and swamps in pursuit of game, and murmuring at the end of the day's sport because you did not obtain an equal division of the spoils. If these, or any one of them, should appear to form part of your character, then these remarks respecting the slothful hunter are applicable to you; and I would earnestly recommend you to set about reforming the conduct which justifies them, with all convenient despatch.

The sum of the whole is this. Our pastime is one sanctioned by the remotest antiquity — and the practice of men of the highest standing in modern times.

Let us never disgrace it by any of the malpractices of either slothful or unfair sportsmen. Let us resolutely determine never to shoot out of season; never, in season, to neglect any convenient opportunity of following our sport with judgement and diligence; to beat our ground with care and perseverance; to keep our appointments with scrupulous punctuality; to avoid such a derangement of our affairs as to suffer a companion to remain one minute in suspense; and never condescend to roast, boil, or stew, any kind of game unless it be of our own killing; it is beneath the character of a true sportsman so to do. At the same time we may remark in conclusion, that an exception should be made in favour of some few persons. Such individuals as myself for example, whose avocations in supplying you with *spirit*-ual things, render it impossible for him to hunt, may lawfully accept of game presents from such of you as are unaffected by similar impediments. And you are hereby informed (in the most delicate manner) that it is *your duty*, occasionally, thus to contribute to the enjoyments of him who has so frequently laboured to the best of his poor ability for both your instruction and amusement. May the spirit of Nimrod so dispose your hearts and minds,as to induce you to act in reference to this hint in future, in such a manner that the recording angel may be justified in blotting out all your former sins of omission of the nature alluded to, and which you cannot but clearly understand.

V

THE WARWICK WOODLANDS

'Frank Forester'

1845

Day the First

It was a fine October evening when I was sitting on the back stoop of his cheerful little bachelor's establishment in Mercer street, with my old friend and comrade, Henry Archer. Many a frown of fortune had we two weathered out together; in many of her brightest smiles had we two revelled — never was there a stauncher friend, a merrier companion, a keener sportsman, or a better fellow, than this said Harry; and here had we two met, three thousand miles from home, after almost ten years of separation, just the same careless, happy, dare-all do-no-goods that we were when we parted in St. James's street, — he for the West, I for the Eastern World — he to fell trees, and build log huts in the backwoods of Canada, — I to shoot tigers and drink arrack punch in the Carnatic. The world had wagged with us as with most others: now up, now down, and laid us to, at last, far enough from the goal for which we started — so that, as I have said already, on landing in New York, having heard nothing of him for ten years, whom the deuce should I tumble on but that same worthy, snugly housed, with a neat bachelor's menage, and every thing ship-shape about him? — So, in the natural course of things, we were at once inseparables.

Well — as I said before, it was a bright October evening, with the clear sky, rich sunshine, and brisk breezy freshness, which indicate that loveliest of American months, — dinner was over, and with a pitcher of the liquid ruby of Latour, a brace of half-pint beakers, and a score — my contribution — of those most exquisite of smokables, the true old Manilla cheroots, we were consoling the inward man in a way that would have opened the eyes, with abhorrent admiration, of any advocate of that coldest of comforts — cold water — who should have got a chance peep at our snuggery.

Suddenly, after a long pause, during which he had been stimulating his ideas by assiduous fumigation, blowing off his steam in a long vapory cloud that curled a minute afterward about his temples, — 'What say you, Frank, to a start to-morrow?' exclaimed Harry, — 'and a week's right good shooting?'

'Why, as for that,' said I, 'I wish for nothing better — but where the deuce would you go to get shooting?'

'Never fash your beard, man,' he replied, 'I'll find the ground and the game too, so you'll find share of the shooting! — Holloa! there — Tim, Tim Matlock.'

And in brief space that worthy minister of mine host's pleasures made his appearance, smoothing down his short black hair, clipped in the orthodox bowl fashion, over his bluff good natured visage with one hand, while he employed its fellow in hitching up a pair of most voluminous unmentionables, of thick Yorkshire cord.

A character was Tim — and now I think of it, worthy of brief description. Born, I believe — bred, certainly, in a hunting stable, far more of his life passed in the saddle than elsewhere, it was not a little characteristic of my friend Harry to have selected this piece of Yorkshire oddity as his especial body servant; but if the choice were queer, it was at least successful, for an honester, more faithful, hard-working, and withal, better hearted, and more humorous varlet never drew curry-comb over horse-hide, or clothes-brush over broadcloth.

His visage was, as I have said already, bluff and good-natured, with a pair of hazel eyes, of the smallest — but, at the same time, of the very merriest — twinkling from under the thick black eye-brows, which were the only hairs suffered to grace his clean-shaven countenance. An indescribable pug nose, and a good clean cut mouth, with a continual dimple at the left corner, made up his phiz. For the rest, four feet ten inches did Tim stand in his stockings, about two-ten of which were monopolized by his back, the shoulders of which would have done honor to a six foot pugilist, — his legs, though short and bowed a little outward, by continual horse exercise, were right tough serviceable members, and I have seen them bearing their owner on through mud and mire, when straighter, longer, and more fair proportioned limbs were at an awful discount.

Depositing his hat then on the floor, smoothing his hair, and hitching up his smalls, and striving most laboriously not to grin till he should have cause, stood Tim, like 'Giafar awaiting his master's award!'

'Tim!' said Harry Archer ——

'Sur!' said Tim.

'Tim! Mr. Forester and I are talking of going up to-morrow — what do you say to it?'

'Oop yonner?' queried Tim, in the most extraordinary West-Riding Yorkshire, indicating the direction, by pointing his right thumb over his left shoulder — 'Weel, Ay'se nought to say aboot it — not Ay!'

'Soh! the cattle are all right, and the wagon in good trim, and the dogs in exercise, are they?'

'Ay'se warrant um!'

'Well, then, have all ready for a start at six to-morrow, — put Mr. Forester's Manton along with my Joe Spurling in the top tray of the case, my single gun and my double rifle in the lower, and see the magazine well filled — the Diamond gunpowder, you know, from Mr. Brough's. You'll put up what Mr. Forester will want, for a week, you know — he does not know the country yet, Tim; — and, hark you, what wine have I at Tom Draw's?'

'No but a case of claret.'

'I thought so, then away with you! down to the Baron's and get two baskets of the Star, and stop at Fulton Market, and get the best half hundred round of spiced beef you can — and then go up to Starke's at the Octagon, and get a gallon of his old Ferintosh — that's all, Tim — off with you! — No! stop a minute!' and he filled up a beaker and handed it to the original, who, shutting both his eyes, suffered the fragrant claret to roll down his gullet in the most scientific fashion, and then, with what he called a bow, turned right about, and exit.

The sun rose bright on the next morning, and half an hour before the appointed time, Tim entered my bed-chamber, with a cup of mocha, and the intelligence that 'Measter had been oop this hour and better, and did na like to be kept waiting!' — so up I jumped, and scarcely had got through the business of rigging myself, before the rattle of wheels announced the arrival of the wagon.

And a model was that shooting wagon — a long, light-bodied box, with a low rail — a high seat and dash in front, and a low servant's seat behind, with lots of room for four men and as many dogs, with guns and luggage, and all appliances to boot, enough to last a month, stowed away out of sight, and out of reach of weather. The nags, both nearly thorough-bred, fifteen two inches high, stout, clean-limbed, active animals — the off-side horse a gray, almost snow-white — the near, a dark chestnut, nearly black — with square docks setting admirably off their beautiful round quarters, high crests, small blood-like heads, and long thin manes — spoke volumes for Tim's stable science; for though their ribs were slightly visible, their muscles were well filled, and hard as granite. Their coats glanced in the sunshine — the white's like statuary marble; the chestnut's like high polished copper — in short the whole turn-out was perfect.

The neat black harness, relieved merely by a crest, with every strap that could be needed, in its place, and not one buckle or one thong superfluous; the bright steel curbs, with the chains jingling as the horses tossed and pawed impatient for a start; the tapering holly whip; the bear-skins covering the seats; the top-coats spread above them — every thing, in a word, without bordering on the slang, was perfectly correct and gnostic.

Four dogs — a brace of setters of the light active breed, one of which will out-work a brace of the large, lumpy, heavy-headed dogs, — one red, the other white and liver, both with black noses, their legs and sterns beautifully feathered, and their hair, glossy and smooth as silk, showing their excellent condition — and a brace of short-legged, bony, liver-colored spaniels — with their noses thrust one above the other, over or through the railings, and their tails waving with impatient joy — occupied the after portion of the wagon.

Tim, rigged in plain gray frock, with leathers and white tops stood, in true tiger fashion, at the horses' heads, with the fore-finger of his right hand resting upon the curb of the gray horse, as with his left he rubbed the nose of the chestnut; while Harry, cigar in mouth, was standing at the wheel, reviewing with a steady and experienced eye the gear, which seemed to give him perfect satisfaction. The moment I appeared on the steps,

'In with you, Frank — in with you,' he exclaimed, disengaging the hand-reins from the terrets into which they had been thrust, 'I have been waiting here these five minutes. Jump up, Tim!'

And, gathering the reins up firmly, he mounted by the wheel, tucked the top-coat about his legs, shook out the long lash of his tandem whip, and lapped it up in good style.

'I always drive with one of these' — he said, half apologetically, as I thought — 'they are so handy on the road for the cur dogs, when you have setters with you — they plague your life out else. Have you the pistol-case in, Tim, for I don't see it?'

'All raight, sur,' answered he, not over well pleased, as it seemed, that it should even be suspected that he could have forgotten any thing — 'All raight!'

'Go along, then,' cried Harry, and at the word the high bred nags went off; and though my friend was too good and too old a hand to worry his cattle at the beginning of a long day's journey — many minutes had not passed before we found ourselves on board the ferry-boat, steaming it merrily towards the Jersey shore.

'A quarter past six to the minute,' said Harry, as we landed at Hoboken.

'Let Shot and Chase run, Tim, but keep the spaniels in till we pass Hackensack.'

'Awa wi ye, ye rascels,' exclaimed Tim, and out went the high blooded dogs upon the instant, yelling and jumping in delight about the horses — and off we went, through the long sandy street of Hoboken, leaving the private race-course of that stanch sportsman, Mr. Stevenson on the left, with several powerful horses taking their walking exercise in their neat body clothes.

'That puts me in mind, Frank,' said Harry, as he called my attention to the thorough-breds, 'we must be back next Tuesday for the Beacon Races — the new course up there on the hill; you can see the steps that lead to it — and now is not this lovely?' he continued, as we mounted the first ridge of Weehawken, and looked back over the beautiful broad Hud-

GOING OUT
From 'The Sporting Review,' 1839

son, gemmed with a thousand snowy sails of craft or shipping — 'Is not this lovely, Frank? and, by the by, you will say, when we get to our journey's end, you never drove through prettier scenery in your life. Get away, Bob, you villain — nibbling, nibbling at your curb! get away, lads!'

And away we went at a right rattling pace over the hills, and through the cedar swamp; and, passing through a toll-gate, stopped with a sudden jerk at a long low tavern on the left-hand side.

'We must stop here, Frank. My old friend, Ingliss, a brother trigger, too, would think the world was coming to an end if I drove by — twenty-nine minutes these six miles,' he added, looking at his watch, 'that will do! Now, Tim, look sharp — just a sup of water! Good day — good day to you, Mr. Ingliss; now for a glass of your milk punch' — and mine host disappeared, and in a moment came forth with two rummers of the delicious compound, a big bright lump of ice bobbing about in each among the nutmeg.

'What, off again for Orange county, Mr. Archer? I was telling the old woman yesterday that we should have you by before long; well, you'll find cock pretty plenty, I expect; there was a chap by here from Ulster — let me see, what day was it — Friday, I guess — with produce, and he was telling, they have had no cold snap yet up there! Thank you, sir, good luck to you!'

And off we went again, along a level road, crossing the broad, slow river from whence it takes its name, into the town of Hackensack.

'We breakfast here, Frank' — as he pulled up beneath the low Dutch shed projecting over half the road in front of the neat tavern — 'How are you, Mr. Vanderbeck — we want a beefsteak, and a cup of tea, as quick as you can give it us; we'll make the tea ourselves; bring in the black tea, Tim — the nags as usual.'

'Aye! aye! sur' — 'tak them out — leave t' harness on, all but their bridles' — to an old gray-headed hostler. 'Whisp off their legs a bit; Ay will be oot enoo!'

After as good a breakfast as fresh eggs, good country bread — worth ten times the poor trash of city bakers — prime butter, cream, and a fat steak could furnish, at a cheap rate, and with a civil and obliging landlord, away we went again over the red hills — an infernal ugly road, sandy, and rough, and stony — for ten miles farther to New Prospect.

'Now you shall see some scenery worth looking at,' said Harry, as we started again, after watering the horses, and taking in a bag with a peck of oats — 'to feed at three o'clock, Frank, when we stop to grub, which we must do al fresco —' my friend explained — 'for the landlord, who kept the only tavern on the road, went West this summer, bit by the land mania, and there is now no stopping place 'twixt this and Warwick,' naming the village for which we were bound. 'You have that beef boiled, Tim?'

'Ay'd been a fouil else, and aye so often oop t' road too,' answered he with a grin, 'and t' moostard is mixed, and t' pilot biscuit in, and a good bit o' Cheshire cheese! wee's doo, Ay reckon. Ha! ha! ha!'

And now my friend's boast was indeed fulfilled; for when we had driven a few miles farther, the country became undulating, with many and bright streams of water; the hillsides clothed with luxuriant woodlands, now in their many-colored garb of autumn beauty; the meadow-land rich in unchanged fresh greenery — for the summer had been mild and rainy — with here and there a buckwheat stubble showing its ruddy face, replete with promise of quail in the present, and of hot cakes in future; and the bold chain of mountains, which, under many names, but always beautiful and wild, sweeps from the Highlands of the Hudson, west and southwardly, quite through New Jersey, forming a link between the White and Green Mountains of New Hampshire and Vermont, and the famous Alleghanies of the South.

A few miles farther yet, the road wheeled round the base of the Tourne Mountain, a magnificent bold hill, with a bare craggy head, its sides and skirts thick set with cedars and hickory — entering a defile through which the Ramapo, one of the loveliest streams eye ever looked upon, comes rippling with its crystal waters over bright pebbles, on its way to join the two kindred rivulets which form the fair Passaic. Throughout the whole of the defile, nothing can possibly surpass the loveliness of nature; the road hard and smooth, and level, winding and wheeling parallel to the gurgling river, crossing it two or three times in each mile, now on one side, and now on the other — the valley now barely broad enough to permit the highway and the stream to pass between the abrupt masses of rock and forest, now expanding into rich basins of green meadow-land, the deepest and most fertile possible — the hills of every shape and size — here bold, and bare, and rocky — there swelling up in grand round masses, pile above pile of verdure, to the blue firmament of autumn. By and by we drove through a thriving little village, nestling in a hollow of the hills, beside a broad bright pond, whose waters keep a dozen manufactories of cotton and of iron — with which mineral these hills abound — in constant operation; and passing by the tavern, the departure of whose owner Harry had so pathetically mourned, we wheeled again round a projecting spur of hill into a narrower defile, and reached another hamlet, far different in its aspect from the busy bustling place we had left some five miles behind.

There were some twenty houses, with two large mills of solid masonry; but of these not one building was now tenanted; the roof-trees broken, the doors and shutters either torn from their hinges, or flapping wildly to and fro; the mill wheels cumbering the stream with masses of decaying timber, and the whole presenting a most desolate and mournful aspect.

'Its story is soon told,' Harry said, catching my inquiring glance — 'a speculating, clever New York merchant — a water-power — a failure — and a consequent desertion of the project; but we must find a berth among the ruins!'

And as he spoke, turning a little off the road, he pulled up on the green sward; 'there's an old stable here that has a manger in it yet! Now, Tim, look sharp!'

And in a twinkling the horses were loosed from the wagon, the harness taken off and hanging on the corners of the ruined hovels, and Tim hissing and rubbing away at the gray horse, while Harry did like duty on the chestnut, in a style that would have done no shame to Melton Mowbray!

'Come, Frank, make yourself useful! Get out the round of beef, and all the rest of the provant — it's on the rack behind; you'll find all right there. Spread our table-cloth on that flat stone by the waterfall, under the willow; clap a couple of bottles of the Baron's champagne into the pool there underneath the fall; let's see whether your Indian campaigning has taught you anything worth knowing!'

To work I went at once, and by the time I had got through — 'Come, Tim,' I heard him say, 'I've got the rough dirt off this fellow, you must polish him, while I take a wash, and get a bit of dinner. Holloa! Frank, are you ready!'

And he came bounding down to the water's edge, with his Newmarket coat in hand, and sleeves rolled up to the elbows, plunged his face into the cool stream, and took a good wash of his soiled hands in the same natural basin. Five minutes afterward we were employed most pleasantly with the spiced beef, white biscuit, and good wine, which came out of the waterfall as cool as Gunter could have made it with all his icing. When we had pretty well got through, and were engaged with our cheroots, up came Tim Matlock.

'T' horses have got through wi' t' corn — they have fed rarely — so I harnessed them, sur, all to the bridles — we can start when you will.'

'Sit down, and get your dinner then, sir — there's a heel-tap in that bottle we have left for you — and when you have done, put up the things, and we'll be off. I say, Frank, let us try a shot with the pistols — I'll get the case — stick up that fellow-commoner upon the fence there, and mark off a twenty paces.'

The marking irons were produced, and loaded — 'Fire — one — two — three' — bang! and the shivering of the glass announced that never more would that shape hold the generous liquor; the ball had struck it plump in the centre, and broken off the whole above the shoulder, for it was fixed neck downward on the stake.

'It is my turn now,' said I; and more by luck, I fancy, than by skill, I took the neck off, leaving nothing but the thick ring of the mouth still sticking on the summit of the fence.

'I'll hold you a dozen of my best Regalias against as many of Manillas, that I break the ring.'

'Done, Harry!'

'Done!'

Again the pistol cracked, and the unerring ball drove the small fragment into a thousand splinters.

'That fotched 'um!' exclaimed Tim, who had come up to announce all ready. 'Ecod, measter Frank, you munna wager i' that gate wi' master, or my name beant Tim, but thou'lt be clean bamboozled.'

Well, not to make a short story long, we got under way again, and, with speed unabated, spanked along at full twelve miles an hour for five miles farther. There, down a wild looking glen, on the left hand, comes brawling, over stump and stone, a tributary streamlet, by the side of which a rough track, made by the charcoal burners and the iron miners, intersects the main road; and up this miserable looking path, for it was little more, Harry wheeled at full trot.

'Now for twelve miles of mountain, the roughest road and wildest country you ever saw crossed in a phaeton, good master Frank.'

And wild it was, indeed, and rough enough in all conscience; narrow, unfenced in many places, winding along the brow of precipices without rail or breastwork, encumbered with huge blocks of stone, and broken by the summer rains! An English stage coachman would have stared aghast at the steep zigzags up the hills, the awkward turns on the descents, the sudden pitches, with now an unsafe bridge, and now a stony ford at the bottom; but through all this, the delicate quick finger, keen eye, and cool head of Harry, assisted by the rare mouths of his exquisitely bitted cattle, piloted us at the rate of full ten miles the hour; the scenery, through which the wild track ran, being entirely of the most wild and savage character of woodland; the bottom filled with gigantic timber trees, cedar, and pine, and hemlock, with a dense undergrowth of rhododendron, calmia and azalea, which, as my friend informed me, made the whole mountains in the summer season one rich bed of bloom. About six miles from the point where we had entered them we scaled the highest ridge of the hills, by a stratum of broken shaley limestone; and, passing at once from the forest into well cultivated fields, came on a new and lovelier prospect — a narrow deep vale scarce a mile in breadth — scooped, as it were, out of the mighty mountains which embosomed it on every side — in the highest state of culture, with rich orchards, and deep meadows, and brown stubbles, whereon the shocks of maize stood fair and frequent; and westward of the road, which, diving down obliquely to the bottom, loses itself in the woods of the opposite hill-side, and only becomes visible again when it emerges to cross over the next summit — the loveliest sheet of water my eye has ever seen, varying from half a mile to a mile in breadth, and about five miles long, with shores indented deeply with the capes and promontories of the wood-clothed hills, which sink abruptly to its margin.

'That is the Greenwood Lake, Frank, called by the monsters here Long Pond! — "the fiends receive their souls there-for," as Walter Scott says — in my mind prettier than Lake George by far, though known to few except chance sportsmen like myself! Full of fish, perch of a pound in weight, and yellow bass in the deep waters, and a good sprinkling of trout, towards this end! Ellis Ketchum killed a five-pounder there this spring! and heaps of summer-duck, the loveliest in plumage of the genus, and the best too, me judice, excepting only the inimitable canvas-back. There are a few deer, too, in the hills, though they are getting scarce of late years. There, from that headland, I killed one, three summers since; I was placed at a stand by the lake's edge, and the dogs drove him right down to me; but I got too eager, and he heard or saw me, and so fetched a turn; but they were close upon him, and the day was hot, and he was forced to soil. I never saw him till he was in the act of leaping from a bluff of ten or twelve feet into the deep lake, but I pitched up my rifle at him, a snap shot! as I would my gun at a cock in a summer brake, and by good luck sent my ball through his heart. There is a finer view yet when we cross this hill, the Bellevale mountain; look out, for we are just upon it; there! Now admire!'

And on the summit he pulled up, and never did I see a landscape more extensively magnificent. Ridge after ridge the mountain sloped down from our feet into a vast rich basin ten miles at least in breadth, by thirty, if not more, in length, girdled on every side by mountains — the whole diversified with wood and water, meadow, and pasture-land, and cornfield — studded with small white villages — with more than one bright lakelet glittering like beaten gold in the declining sun, and several isolated hills standing up boldly from the vale!

'Glorious indeed! Most glorious!' I exclaimed.

'Right, Frank,' he said; 'a man may travel many a day, and not see any thing to beat the vale of Sugar-loaf — so named from that cone-like hill, over the pond there — that peak is eight hundred feet above tide water. Those blue hills, to the far right, are the Hudson Highlands; that bold bluff is the far-famed Anthony's Nose; that ridge across the vale, the second ridge I mean, is the Shawangunks; and those rounded summits, farther yet — those are the Kaatskills! But now a truce with the romantic, for there lies Warwick, and this keen mountain air has found me a fresh appetite!'

Away we went again, rattling down the hills, nothing daunted at their steep pitches, with the nags just as fresh as when they started, champing and snapping at their curbs, till on a table-land above the brook, with the tin steeple of its church peering from out the massy foliage of sycamore and locust, the haven of our journey lay before us.

'Hilloa, hill-oa, ho! whoop! who-whoop!' and with a cheery shout, as we clattered across the wooden bridge, he roused out the population of the village.

'Ya ha ha! — ya yah!' yelled a great woolly-headed coal-black negro. 'Here 'm massa Archer back again — massa ben well, I spect —'

'Well — to be sure I have, Sam,' cried Harry. 'How's old Poll? Bid her come up to Draw's to-morrow night — I've got a red and yellow frock for her — a deuce of a concern!'

'Yah ha! yah ha ha haah!' and amid a most discordant chorus of African merriment, we passed by a neat farm-house shaded by two glorious locusts on the right, and a new red brick mansion, the pride of the village, with a flourishing store on the left — and wheeled up to the famous Tom Draw's tavern — a long white house with a piazza six feet wide, at the top of eight steep steps, and a one-story kitchen at the end of it; pump with a gilt pine-apple at the top of it, and horse-trough, a wagon shed and stable sixty feet long; a sign-post with an indescribable female figure swinging upon it, and an ice house over the way!

Such was the house, before which we pulled up just as the sun was setting, amid a gabbling of ducks, a barking of terriers, mixed with the deep bay of two or three large heavy fox-hounds which had been lounging about in the shade, and a peal of joyous welcome from all beings, quadruped or biped, within hearing.

'Hulloa! boys! Walk in! walk in! What the eternal h——l are you about there?'

Well, we did walk into a large neat bar-room, with a bright hickory log crackling upon the hearth-stone, a large round table in one corner, covered with draught-boards, and old newspapers, among which showed pre-eminent the 'Spirit of the Times'; a range of pegs well stored with great-coats, fishing-rods, whips, game-bags, spurs, and every other stray appurtenance of sporting, gracing one end; while the other was more gaily decorated by the well furnished bar, in the right-hand angle of which my eye detected in an instant a handsome nine pound double barrel, an old six foot Queen Ann's tower-musket, and a long smooth-bored rifle; and last, not least, outstretched at easy length upon the counter of his bar, to the left-hand of the gang-way — the right side being more suitably decorated with tumblers, and decanters of strange compounds — supine, with fair round belly towering upward, and head voluptuously pillowed on a heap of wagon cushions — lay in his glory — but no! hold! — the end of a chapter is no place to introduce — Tom Draw!

Day the Second

Much as I had heard of Tom Draw, I was I must confess, taken altogether aback when I, for the first time, set eyes upon him. I had heard Harry Archer talk of him fifty times as a crack shot; as a top sawyer at a long day's fag; as the man of all others he would choose as his mate, if he were to shoot a match, two against two — what then was my astonishment at beholding this worthy, as he reared himself slowly from his recumbent position? It is true, I had heard his sobriquet, 'Fat Tom,' but, Heaven and Earth! such a mass of beef and brandy as stood before me, I had never even dreamt of.

About five feet six inches at the very utmost in the perpendicular, by six or ‘by’r lady’ — nearer seven in circumference, weighing, at the least computation, two hundred and fifty pounds, with a broad jolly face, its every feature — well-formed and handsome, rather than otherwise — mantling with an expression of the most perfect excellence of heart and temper, and overshadowed by a vast mass of brown hair, sprinkled pretty well with gray! — Down he plumped from the counter with a thud that made the whole floor shake, and with a hand outstretched, that might have done for a Goliath, out he strode to meet us.

‘Why, hulloa! hulloa! Mr. Archer,’ shaking his hand till I thought he would have dragged the arm clean out of the socket — ‘How be you, boy? How be you?’

‘Right well, Tom, can’t you see? Why confound you, you’ve grown twenty pound heavier since July! — but here, I’m losing all my manners! — this is Frank Forester, whom you have heard me talk about so often! He dropped down here out of the moon, Tom, I believe! at least I thought about as much of seeing the man in the moon, as of meeting him in this wooden country — but here he is, as you see, come all the way to take a look at the natives. And so, you see, as you’re about the greatest curiosity I know of in these parts, I brought him straight up here to take a peep! Look at him, Frank — look at him well! Now, did you ever see, in all your life, so extraordinary an old devil? — and yet, Frank, which no man could possibly believe, the old fat animal has some good points about him — he can walk some! shoot, as he says, first best! and drink — good Lord, how he can drink!’

‘And that reminds me,’ exclaimed Tom, who with a ludicrous mixture of pleasure, bashfulness, and mock anger, had been listening to what he evidently deemed a high encomium; ‘that we hav’nt drinked yet; have you quit drink, Archer, since I was to York? What’ll you take, Mr. Forester? Gin? yes, I have got some prime gin! You never sent me up them groceries though, Archer; well, then, here's luck! What, Yorkshire, is that you? I should ha' thought now, Archer, you'd have cleared that lazy Injun out afore this time!'

'Whoy, measter Draa — what 'na loike's that kind o'talk? — coom coom now, where'll Ay tak t' things tull?'

'Put Mr. Forester's box in the bed-room off the parlor — mine up stairs, as usual,' cried Archer. 'Look sharp and get the traps out. Now, Tom, I suppose you have got no supper for us?'

'Cooper, Cooper! you snooping little devil,' yelled Tom, addressing his second hope, a fine dark-eyed, bright-looking lad of ten or twelve years; 'Don't you see Mr. Archer's come? — away with you and light the parlor fire, look smart now, or I'll cure you! Supper — you're always eat! eat! eat! or, drink! drink! — drunk! Yes! supper; we've got pork! and chickens ——'

'Oh! d——n your chickens,' chimed in Harry, 'old superannuated cocks which must be caught now, and then beheaded, and then soused into hot water to fetch off the feathers; and save you lazy devils the trouble of picking them. No, no, Tom! get us some fresh meat for to-morrow; and for to-night let us have some hot potatoes, and some bread and butter, and we'll find beef; eh, Frank? and now look sharp, for we must be up in good time to-morrow, and, to be so we must to bed betimes. And now, Tom, are there any cock?'

'Cock! yes, I guess there be, and quail, too, pretty plenty! quite a smart chance of them, and not a shot fired among them this fall, any how!'

'Well, which way must we beat to-morrow? I calculate to shoot three days with you here; and, on Wednesday night when we get in, to hitch up and drive into Sullivan, and see if we can't get a deer or two! You'll go, Tom?'

'Well, well, we'll see any how; but for to-morrow, why I guess we must beat the 'Squire's swamp-hole first; there's ten or twelve cock there, I know; I see them there myself last

Sunday; and then acrost them buck-wheat stubbles, and the big bog meadow, there's a drove of quail there; two or three bevys got in one, I reckon; leastwise I counted thirty-three last Friday was a week; and through Seer's big swamp, over to the great spring!'

'How is Seer's swamp? too wet, I fancy,' Archer interposed, 'at least I noticed, from the mountain, that all the leaves were changed in it, and that the maples were quite bare.'

'Pretty fair, pretty fair, I guess,' replied stout Tom, 'I harnt been there myself though, but Jem was down with the hounds arter an old fox t'other day, and sure enough he said the cock kept flopping up quite thick afore him; but then the critter will lie, Harry; he will lie like thunder, you know; but somehow I concaits there be cock there too; and then, as I was saying, we'll stop at the great spring and get a bite of summat, and then beat Hell-hole; you'll have sport there for sartin! What dogs have you got with you Harry?'

'Your old friends, Shot and Chase, and a couple of spaniels for thick covert!'

'Now, gentlemen, your suppers are all ready.'

'Come, Tom,' cried Archer; 'you must take a bite with us — Tim, bring us in three bottles of champagne, and lots of ice, do you hear?'

And the next moment we found ourselves installed in a snug parlor, decorated with a dozen sporting prints, a blazing hickory fire snapping and sputtering and roaring in a huge Franklin stove; our luggage safely stowed in various corners, and Archer's double gun-case propped on two chairs below the window.

An old-fashioned round table, covered with clean white linen of domestic manufacture, displayed the noble round of beef which we had brought up with us, flanked by a platter of magnificent potatoes, pouring forth volumes of dense steam through the cracks in their dusky skins; a lordly dish of butter, that might have pleased the appetite of Sisera; while eggs and ham, and pies of apple, mince-meat, cranberry, and custard, occupied every vacant space, save where two ponderous pitchers, mantling with ale and cider, and two respectable square bottles, labelled 'Old Rum' and 'Brandy — 1817,' relieved the prospect. Before we had sat down, Timothy entered, bearing a horse bucket filled to the brim with ice, from whence protruded the long necks and split corks of three champagne bottles.

'Now, Tim,' said Archer, 'get your own supper, when you've finished with the cattle; feed the dogs well to-night; and then to bed. And hark you, call me at five in the morning; we shall want you to carry the game-bag and the drinkables; take care of yourself, Tim, and good night!'

'No need to tell him that,' cried Tom, 'he's something like yourself; *I tell* you, Archer, if Tim ever dies of thirst, it must be where there is nothing wet, but water!'

'Now hark to the old scoundrel, Frank,' said Archer, 'hark to him pray, and if he doesn't out-eat both of us, and out-drink anything you ever saw, may I miss my first bird to-morrow — that's all! Give me a slice of beef, Frank; that old Goth would cut it an inch thick, if I let him touch it; out with a cork, Tom! Here's to our sport to-morrow!'

'Uh; that goes good!' replied Tom, with an oath, which, by the apparent gusto of the speaker, seemed to betoken that the wine had tickled his palate — 'that goes good! that's different from the darned red trash you left up here last time.'

'And of which you have left none, I'll be bound,' answered Archer, laughing; 'my best Latour, Frank, which the old infidel calls trash.'

'It's all below, every bottle of it,' answered Tom: 'I wouldn't use such rotgut stuff, no, not for vinegar. 'Taint half so good as that red sherry you had up here oncet; that was poor weak stuff, too, but it did well to make milk punch of; it did well instead of milk.'

'Now, Frank,' said Archer, 'you won't believe me, that I know; but it's true, all the same. A year ago, this autumn, I brought up five gallons of exceedingly stout, rather fiery, young, brown sherry — draught wine, you know! — and what did Tom do here, but mix it half and half, with brandy, nutmeg, and sugar, and drink it for milk punch!'

'I did *so*, by the eternal,' replied Tom, bolting a huge lump of beef, in order to enable himself to answer — 'I did *so*, and good milk punch it made, too, but it was too weak! Come, Mr. Forester, we harn't drinked yet, and I'm kind o' gittin dry!'

And now the mirth waxed fast and furious — the champagne speedily was finished, the supper things cleared off, hot water and Starke's Ferintosh succeeded, cheroots were lighted, we drew closer in about the fire, and, during the circulation of two tumblers — for to this did Harry limit us, having the prospect of unsteady hands and aching heads before him for the morrow — never did I hear more genuine and real humor, than went round our merry trio.

Tom Draw, especially, though all his jokes were not such altogether as I can venture to insert in my chaste paragraphs, and though at times his oaths were too extravagantly rich to brook repetition, shone forth resplendent. No longer did I wonder at what I had before deemed Harry Archer's strange hallucination; Tom Draw is a decided genius — rough as a pine knot in his native woods — but full of mirth, of shrewdness, of keen mother wit, of hard horse sense, and last, not least, of the most genuine milk of human kindness. He is a rough block; but, as Harry says, there is solid timber under the uncouth bark enough to make five hundred men, as men go now-a-days in cities!

At ten o'clock, thanks to the excellent precautions of my friend Harry, we were all snugly berthed, before the whiskey, which had well justified the high praise I had heard lavished on it, had made any serious inroads on our understanding but not before we had laid in a quantum to ensure a good night's rest.

Bright and early was I on foot the next day, but before I had half dressed myself I was assured, by the clatter of the breakfast things, that Archer had again stolen a march upon me; and the next moment my bed-room door, driven open by the thick boot of that worthy, gave me a full view of his person — arrayed in a stout fustian jacket — with half a dozen pockets in full view, and Heaven only knows how many more lying perdu in the broad skirts. Knee-breeches of the same material, with laced half-boots and leather leggins, set off his stout calf and well turned ankle.

'Up! up! Frank,' he exclaimed, 'it is a morning of ten thousand; there has been quite a heavy dew, and by the time we are afoot it will be well evaporated; and then the scent will lie, I promise you! make haste, I tell you, breakfast is ready!'

Stimulated by his hurrying voice, I soon completed my toilet, and entering the parlor found Harry busily employed in stirring to and fro a pound of powder on one heated dinner plate, while a second was undergoing the process of preparation on the hearth-stone under a glowing pile of hickory ashes.

At the side-table, covered with guns, dog-whips, nipple-wrenches, and the like, Tim, rigged like his master, in half-boots and leggins, but with a short roundabout of velveteen, in place of the full-skirted jacket, was filling our shot-pouches by aid of a capacious funnel, more used, as its odor betokened, to facilitate the passage of gin or Jamaica spirits than of so sober a material as cold lead.

At the same moment entered mine host, togged for the field in a huge pair of cow-hide boots, reaching almost to the knee, into the tops of which were tucked the lower ends of a pair of trowsers, containing yards enough of buffalo-cloth to have eked out the main-sail of a North River sloop; a waistcoat and single-breasted jacket of the same material, with a fur cap, completed his attire; but in his hand he bore a large decanter filled with a pale yellowish liquor, embalming a dense mass of fine and worm-like threads, not very different in appearance from the best vermicelli.

'Come, boys, come — here's your bitters,' he exclaimed; and, as if to set the example, filled a big tumbler to the brim, gulped it down as if it had been water, smacked his lips, and incontinently tendered it to Archer, who, to my great amazement, filled himself likewise a more moderate draught, and quaffed it without hesitation.

'That's good, Tom,' he said, pausing after the first sip; 'that's the best I ever tasted here; how old's that?'

'Five years!' Tom replied: 'five years last fall! Daddy Tom made it out of my own best apples — take a horn, Mr. Forester,' he added, turning to me — 'it's first best cider sperrits — better a darned sight than that Scotch stuff you make such an eternal fuss about, toting it up here every time, as if we'd nothing fit to drink in the country!'

And so to my sorrow I did taste it — old apple whiskey, with Lord knows how much snake-root soaked in it for five years! They may talk about gall being bitter; but, by all that's wonderful, there was enough of the amari aliquid in this fonte, to me by no means of leporum, to have given an extra touch of bitterness to all the gall beneath the canopy; and with my mouth puckered up, till it was like anything on earth but a mouth, I set the glass down on the table; and for the next five minutes could do nothing but shake my head to and fro like a Chinese mandarin, amidst the loud and prolonged roars of laughter that burst like thunder claps from the huge jaws of Thomas Draw, and the subdued and half respectful cachinnations of Tim Matlock.

By the time I had got a little better, the black tea was ready, and with thick cream, hot buckwheat cakes, beautiful honey, and — as a stand by — the still venerable round, we made out a very tolerable meal.

This done, with due deliberation Archer supplied his several pockets with their accustomed load — the clean-punched wads in this — in that the Westley Richards' caps — here a pound horn of powder — there a shot-pouch on Syke's lever principle, with double mouth-piece — in another, screw-driver, nipple-wrench, and the spare cones; and, to make up the tale, dog-whip, dram-bottle, and silk handkerchief in the sixth and last.

'Nothing like method in this world,' said Harry, clapping his low-crowned broad-brimmed mohair cap upon his head; 'take my word for it. Now, Tim, what have you got in the bag?'

'A bottle of champagne, sur,' answered Tim, who was now employed slinging a huge fustian game-bag, with a net-work front, over his right shoulder, to counterbalance two full shot-belts which were already thrown across the other — 'a bottle of champagne, sur — a cold roast chicken — t' Cheshire cheese — and t' pilot biscuits. Is your dram-bottle filled wi' t' whiskey, please sur?'

'Aye, aye, Tim. Now let loose the dogs — carry a pair of couples and leash along with you; and mind you, gentlemen, Tim carries shot for all hands; and luncheon — but each one finds his own powder, caps, &c.; and any one who wants a dram, carries his own — the devil a-one of you gets a sup out of my bottle, or a charge out of my flask! That's right, old Trojan, isn't it?' with a good slap on Tom's broad shoulder.

'Shot! Shot — why Shot! don't you know me, old dog?' cried Tom, as the two setters bounded into the room, joyful at their release — 'good dog! good Chase!' feeding them with great lumps of beef.

'Avast! there Tom — have done with that,' cried Harry; 'you'll have the dogs so full that they can't run.'

'Why, how'd you like to hunt all day without your breakfast — hey?'

'Here, lads! here, lads! wh-e-ew!' and followed by his setters, with gun under his arm, away went Harry; and catching up our pieces likewise, we followed, nothing loth, Tim bringing up the rear with the two spaniels fretting in their couples, and a huge black thorn cudgel, which he had brought, as he informed me, 'all t' way from bonny Cawoods.'

It was as beautiful a morning as ever lighted sportsmen to their labors. The dew, exhaled already from the long grass, still glittered here and there upon the shrubs and trees, though a soft fresh south-western breeze was shaking it thence momently in bright and rustling showers; the sun, but newly risen, and as yet partially enveloped in the thin gauze-like mists so frequent at that season, was casting shadows, seemingly endless, from every object that intercepted his low rays, and chequering the whole landscape with that play of light and shade, which is the loveliest accessory to a lovely scene; and lovely was the scene, indeed, as e'er was looked upon by painter's or by poet's eye — how then should humble prose do justice to it?

Seated upon the first slope of a gentle hill, midway of the great valley heretofore described, the village looked due south, toward the chains of mountains, which we had crossed the preceding evening, and which in that direction bounded the landscape. These ridges, cultivated half-way up their swelling sides, which lay mapped out before our eyes in all the various beauty of orchards, yellow stubbles, and rich pastures dotted with sleek and comely cattle, were rendered yet more lovely and romantic, by here and there a woody gorge, or rocky chasm, channelling their smooth flanks, and carrying down their tributary rills, to swell the main stream at their base. Toward these we took our way by the same road which we had followed in an opposite direction on the previous night — but for a short space only — for having crossed the stream, by the same bridge which we had passed on entering the village, Tom Draw pulled down a set of bars to the left, and strode out manfully into the stubble.

'Hold up, good lads! — whe-ew-whewt!' and away went the setters through the moist stubble, heads up and sterns down, like fox-hounds on a breast-high scent, yet under the most perfect discipline; for at the very first note of Harry's whistle, even when racing at the top of their pace, they would turn simultaneously, alter their course, cross each other at right angles, and quarter the whole field, leaving no foot of ground unbeaten.

No game, however, in this instance, rewarded their exertions; and on we went across a meadow, and two other stubbles, with the like result. But now we crossed a gentle hill, and, at its base, came on a level tract, containing at the most ten acres of marsh land, overgrown with high coarse grass and flags. Beyond this, on the right, was a steep rocky hillock, covered with tall and thrifty timber of some thirty years' growth, but wholly free of underwood. Along the left-hand fence ran a thick belt of underwood, sumach and birch, with a few young oak trees interspersed; but in the middle of the swampy level, covering at most five or six acres, was a dense circular thicket composed of every sort of thorny bush and shrub, matted with cat-briers and wild vines, and overshadowed by a clump of tall leafy ashes, which had not as yet lost one atom of their foliage, although the underwood beneath them was quite sere and leafless.

'Now then,' cried Harry, 'this is the 'Squire's swamp-hole!' Now for a dozen cock! hey, Tom? Here, couple up the setters, Tim; and let the spaniels loose. Now Flash! now Dan! down charge, you little villains!' and the well broke brutes dropped on the instant. 'How must we beat this cursed hole?'

'You must go through the very thick of it, consarn you!' exclaimed Tom; 'at your old work already, hey? trying to shirk at first!'

'Don't swear so! you old reprobate! I know my place, depend on it,' cried Archer; 'but what to do with the rest of you! — there's the rub!'

'Not a bit of it!' cried Tom — 'here Yorkshire — Ducklegs

— here, what's your name — get away you with those big dogs — atwixt the swamp-hole, and the brush there by the fence, and look out that you mark every bird to an inch! You, Mr. Forester, go in there, under that butter-nut; you'll find a blind track there, right through the brush — keep that 'twixt Tim and Mr. Archer; and keep your eyes skinned, do! there'll be a cock up before you're ten yards in. Archer, you'll go right through and I'll ——'

'You'll keep well forward on the right — and mind that no bird crosses to the hill; we never get them, if they once get over. All right! In with you now! Steady, Flash! steady! hie up, Dan!' and in a moment Harry was out of sight among the brush-wood, though his progress might be traced by the continual crackling of the thick underwood.

Scarce had I passed the butter-nut, when, even as Tom had said, up flapped a woodcock scarcely ten yards before me, in the open path, and rising heavily to clear the branches of a tall thorn bush, showed me his full black eye, and tawny breast, as fair a shot as could be fancied.

'Mark!' halloaed Harry to my right, his quick ear having caught the flap of the bird's wing, as he rose. 'Mark cock — Frank!'

Well — steadily enough, as I thought, I pitched my gun up! covered my bird fairly! pulled! — the trigger gave not to my finger. I tried the other. Devil's in it, I had forgot to cock my gun! and ere I could retrieve my error, the bird had topped the bush, and dodged out of sight, and off — 'Mark! mark! — Tim!' I shouted.

'Ey! ey! sur — Ay see's um!'

'Why, how's that, Frank?' cried Harry. 'Couldn't you get a shot?'

'Forgot to cock my gun!' I cried; but at the self-same moment the quick sharp yelping of the spaniels came on my ear. 'Steady, Flash! steady, sir! Mark!' But close upon the word came the full round report of Harry's gun. 'Mark! again!'

WOODCOCK SHOOTING
From Scott's 'British Field Sports,' 1820

shouted Harry, and again his own piece sent its loud ringing voice abroad. 'Mark! now a third! mark, Frank!'

And as he spoke I caught the quick rush of his wing, and saw him dart across a space, a few yards to my right. I felt my hand shake; I had not pulled a trigger in ten months, but in a second's space I rallied. There was an opening just before me between a stumpy thick thorn-bush which had saved the last bird, and a dwarf cedar; it was not two yards over; he glanced across it; he was gone, just as my barrel sent its charge into the splintered branches.

'Beautiful!' shouted Harry, who looking through a cross glade, saw the bird fall, which I could not. 'Beautiful shot, Frank! Do all your work like that, and we'll get twenty couple before night!'

'Have I killed him!' answered I, half doubting if he were not quizzing me.

'Killed him? of course you have; doubled him up completely! But look sharp! there are more birds before me! I can hardly keep the dogs down, now! There! there goes one — clean out of shot of me, though! Mark! mark, Tom! Gad, how the fat dog's running!' he continued. 'He sees him! Ten to one he gets him! There he goes — bang! A long shot, and killed clean!'

'Ready!' cried I. 'I'm ready, Archer!'

'Bag your bird, then. He lies under that dock leaf, at the foot of yon red maple! That's it; you've got him. Steady now, till Tom gets loaded!'

'What did you do?' asked I. 'You fired twice, I think!'

'Killed two!' he answered. 'Ready, now!' and on he went, smashing away the boughs before him, while ever and anon I heard his cheery voice, calling or whistling to his dogs, or rousing up the tenants of some thickets into which even he could not force his way; and I, creeping, as best I might, among the tangled brush, now plunging half thigh deep in holes full of tenacious mire, now blundering over the moss-covered stubs, pressed forward, fancying every instant that the rustling of the briers against my jacket was the flip-flap of a rising woodcock. Suddenly, after bursting through a mass of thorns and wild vine, which was in truth almost impassable, I came upon a little grassy spot quite clear of trees, and covered with the tenderest verdure, through which a narrow rill stole silently; and as I set my first foot on it, up jumped, with his beautiful variegated back all reddened by the sunbeams, a fine and full-fed woodcock, with the peculiar twitter which he utters when surprised. He had not gone ten yards, however, before my gun was at my shoulder and the trigger drawn; before I heard the crack I saw him cringe; and, as the white smoke drifted off to leeward, he fell heavily, completely riddled by the shot, into the brake before me; while at the same moment, whir-r-r! up sprung a bevy of twenty quail, at least, startling me for the moment by the thick whirring of their wings, and skirring over the underwood right toward Archer. 'Mark, quail!' I shouted, and, recovering instantly my nerves, fired my one remaining barrel after the last bird! It was a long shot, yet I struck him fairly, and he rose instantly right upward, towering high! high! into the clear blue sky, and soaring still, till his life left him in the air, and he fell like a stone, plump downward!

'Mark him! Tim!'

'Ey! ey! sur. He's a de-ad un, that's a sure thing!'

At my shot all the bevy rose a little, yet altered not their course the least, wheeling across the thicket directly round the front of Archer, whose whereabout I knew, though I could neither see nor hear him. So high did they fly that I could observe them clearly, every bird well defined against the sunny heavens. I watched them eagerly. Suddenly one turned over; a cloud of feathers streamed off down the wind; and then, before the sound of the first shot reached my ears, a second pitched a few yards upward, and, after a heavy flutter, followed its hapless comrade.

Turned by the fall of the leading birds, the bevy again wheeled, still rising higher, and now flying very fast; so that, as I saw by the direction which they took, they would probably give Draw a chance of getting in both barrels. And so indeed it was; for, as before, long ere I caught the booming echoes of his heavy gun, I saw two birds keeled over, and, almost at the same instant, the cheery shout of Tim announced to me that he had bagged my towered bird! After a little pause, again we started, and, hailing one another now and then, gradually forced our way through brake and brier toward the outward verge of the dense covert. Before we met again, however, I had the luck to pick up a third woodcock, and as I heard another double shot from Archer, and two single bangs from Draw, I judged that my companions had not been less successful than myself. At last, emerging from the thicket, we all converged, as to a common point, toward Tim; who, with his game-bag on the ground, with its capacious mouth wide open to receive our game, sat on a stump with the two setters at a charge beside him.

'What do we score?' cried I, as we drew near; 'what do we score?'

'I have four woodcocks, and a brace of quail,' said Harry.

'And I, two cock and a brace,' cried Tom, 'and missed another cock; but he's down in the meadow here, behind that 'ere stump alder!'

'And I, three woodcock and one quail!' I chimed in, naught abashed.

'And Ay'se marked doon three woodcock — two more beside yon big un, that measter Draa made siccan a bungle of — and all t' quail — every feather on um — doon i' t' bog meadow yonner — ooh! but we'se mak grand sport o't!' interposed Tim, now busily employed stringing bird after bird up by the head, with loops and buttons in the game-bag!

'Well done then, all,' said Harry. 'Nine timber-doodles and five quail, and only one shot missed! That's not bad shooting, considering what a hole it is to shoot in. Gentlemen, here's your health,' and filling himself out a fair sized wineglass-full of Ferintosh, into the silver cup of his dram-bottle, he tossed it off; and then poured out a similar libation for Tim Matlock. Tom and myself, nothing loth, obeyed the hint, and sipped our modicums of distilled waters out of our private flasks.

'Now, then,' cried Archer, 'let us pick up these scattering birds. Tom Draw, you can get yours without a dog! And now, Tim, where are yours?'

'T' first lies oop yonner in yon boonch of brachens, ahint t' big scarlet maple; and t' other ——'

'Well! I'll go to the first. You take Mr. Forester to the other, and when we have bagged all three, we'll meet at the bog meadow fence, and then hie at the bevy!'

This job was soon done, for Draw and Harry bagged their birds cleverly at the first rise; and although mine got off at first without a shot, by dodging round a birch tree straight in Tim's face, and flew back slap toward the thicket, yet he pitched in its outer skirt, and as he jumped up wild I cut him down with a broken pinion and a shot through his bill at fifty yards, and Chase retrieved him well.

'Cleverly stopped, indeed!' Frank halloaed; 'and by no means an easy shot! and so our work's clean done for this place, at the least!'

'The boy can shoot some,' observed Tom Draw, who loved to bother Timothy; 'the boy can shoot some, though he doos come from Yorkshire!'

'Gad! and Ay wush Ay'd no but gotten thee i' Yorkshire, measter Draa!' responded Tim.

'Why! what if you had got me there?'

'What? Whoy, Ay'd clap thee iv a cage, and hug thee round t' feasts and fairs loike; and shew thee to t' folks at so mooch a head. Ay'se sure Ay'd mak a fortune o't!'

'He has you there, Tom! Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Archer. 'Tim's down upon you there, by George! Now, Frank, do fancy Tom Draw in a cage at Borough-bridge or Catterick fair! Lord! how the folks would pay to look at him! Fancy the sign board too! The Great American Man-Mammoth! Ha! ha! ha! But come, we must not stay here talking nonsense, or we shall do no good. Show me Tim, where are the quail!'

'Doon i' t' bog meadow yonner! joost i' t' slack, see thee, there!' pointing with the stout black-thorn; 'amang yon bits o' bushes!'

'Very well — that's it; now let go the setters; take Flash and Dan along with you, and cut across the country as straight as you can go to the spring head, where McTavish frightened the bull out of the meadow, under the pin-oak tree. Well! put the champagne into the spring to cool, and rest yourself there till we come; we shan't be long behind you.'

Away went Tim, stopping from time to time to mark our progress, and over the fence into the bog meadow we proceeded; a rascally piece of broken tussocky ground, with black mud knee-deep between the hags, all covered with long grass. The third step I took, over I went upon my nose, but luckily avoided shoving my gun-barrels into the filthy mire.

'Steady, Frank, steady! I'm ashamed of you!' said Harry; 'so hot and impetuous; and your gun too at the full cock; that's the reason, man, why you missed firing at your first bird, this morning. I never cock either barrel till I see my bird; and, if a bevy rises, only one at a time. The birds will lie like stones; and we cannot walk too slow. Steady, Shot, have a care, sir!'

Never, in all my life, did I see any thing more perfect than the style in which the setters drew those bogs. There was no more of racing, no more of impetuous dash; it seemed as if they knew the birds were close before them. At a slow trot, their sterns whipping their flanks at every step, they threaded the high tussocks. See! the red dog straightens his neck, and snuffs the air.

'Look to! look to, Frank! they are close before old Chase!'

Now he draws on again, crouching close to the earth. 'Toho! Shot!' Now he stands! no! no! not yet — at least he is not certain! He turns his head to catch his master's eye! Now his stern moves a little; he draws on again.

There! he is sure now! what a picture — his black full eye intently glaring, though he cannot see any thing in that thick mass of herbage; his nostril wide expanded, his lips slavering from intense excitement; his whole form motionless, and sharply drawn, and rigid, even to the straight stern and lifted foot, as a block wrought to mimic life by some skilful sculptor's chisel; and, scarce ten yards behind, his liver-colored comrade backs him — as firm, as stationary, as immovable, but in his attitude, how different! Chase feels the hot scent steaming up under his very nostril; feels it in every nerve, and quivers with anxiety to dash on his prey, even while perfectly restrained and steady. Shot, on the contrary, though a few minutes since he too was drawing, knows nothing of himself, perceives no indication of the game's near presence, although improved by discipline, his instinct tells him that his mate has found them. Hence the same rigid form, still tail, and constrained attitude, but in his face — for dogs have faces — there is none of that tense energy, that evident anxiety; there is no frown upon his brow, no glare in his mild open eye, no slaver on his lip!

'Come up, Tom; come up, Frank, they are all here; we must get in six barrels; they will not move; come up, I say!'

And on we came, deliberately prompt, and ready. Now we were all in line: Harry the centre man, I on the right, and Tom on the left hand. The attitude of Archer was superb; his legs, set a little apart, as firm as if they had rooted in the soil; his form drawn back a little, and his head erect, with his eye fixed upon the dogs; his gun held in both hands, across his person, the muzzle slightly elevated, his left grasping the trigger guard; the thumb of the right resting upon the hammer, and the fore-finger on the trigger of the left-hand barrel; but, as he said, neither cocked. 'Fall back, Tom, if you please, five yards or so,' he said, as coolly as if he were unconcerned, 'and you come forward, Frank, as many; I want to drive them to the left, into those low red bushes; that will do: now, then, I'll flush them; never mind me, boys, I'll reserve my fire.'

And, as he spoke, he moved a yard or two in front of us, and under his very feet, positively startling me by their noisy flutter, up sprang the gallant bevy; fifteen or sixteen well grown birds, crowding and jostling one against the other. Tom Draw's gun as I well believe, was at his shoulder when they rose; at least his first shot was discharged before they had flown half a rood, and of course harmlessly: the charge must have been driven through them like a single ball; his second barrel instantly succeeded, and down came two birds, caught in the act of crossing. I am myself a quick shot, too quick if anything, yet my first barrel was exploded a moment after Tom Draw's second; the other followed, and I had the satisfaction of bringing both my birds down handsomely; then up went Harry's piece — the bevy being now twenty or twenty-five yards distant — cocking it as it rose, he pulled the trigger almost before it touched his shoulder, so rapid was the movement; and, though scarcely passed between the two reports, and almost on the instant two quail were fluttering out their lives among the bog grass.

Dropping his butt, without a word, or even a glance to the dogs, he quietly went on to load; nor indeed was it needed: at the first shot they dropped into the grass, and there they lay as motionless as if they had been dead, with their heads crouched between their paws; nor did they stir thence till the tick of the gunlocks announced that we again were ready. Then lifting up their heads, and rising on their fore-feet, they sat half erect, eagerly waiting for the signal.

'Hold up, good lads!' and on they drew, and in an instant pointed on the several birds. 'Fetch!' and each brought his burthen to our feet; six birds were bagged at the rise, and thus before eleven o'clock we had picked up a dozen cock, and within one of the same number of fine quail, with only two shots missed. The poor remainder of the bevy had dropped, singly, and scattered, in the red bushes, whither we instantly pursued them, and where we got six more, making a total of seventeen birds bagged out of a bevy, twenty strong at first.

One towered bird of Harry's, certainly killed dead, we could not with all our efforts bring to bag; one bird Tom Draw missed clean, and the remaining one we could not find again; another dram of whiskey, and into Seer's great swamp we started; a large piece of woodland, with every kind of lying. At one end it was open, with soft black loamy soil, covered with docks and colts-foot leaves under the shade of large but leafless willows, and here we picked up a good many scattered woodcock; afterward we got into the heavy thicket with much tangled grass, wherein we flushed a bevy, but they all took to tree, and we made very little of them; and here Tom Draw began to blow and labor; the covert was too thick, the bottom too deep and unsteady for him.

Archer perceiving this, sent him at once to the outside; and three times, as we went along, ourselves moving nothing, we heard the round reports of his large calibre. 'A bird at every shot, I'd stake my life,' said Harry, 'he never misses cross shots in the open'; at the same instant, a tremendous rush of wings burst from the thicket: 'Mark! partridge! partridge!' and as I caught a glimpse of a dozen large birds fluttering up, one close upon the other, and darting away as straight and nearly as fast as bullets, through the dense branches of a cedar brake, I saw the flashes of both Harry's barrels, almost simultaneously discharged, and at the same time over went the objects of his aim; but ere I could get up my gun the rest were out of sight. 'You must shoot, Frank, like lightning, to kill these beggars; they are ruffed grouse, though they call them partridges here: see! are they not fine fellows?'

Another hour's beating, in which we still kept picking up, from time to time, some scattering birds, brought us to the spring head, where we found Tim with luncheon ready, and our fat friend reposing at his side, with two more grouse, and a rabbit which he had bagged along the covert's edge. Cool was the Star champagne; and capital was the cold fowl and Cheshire cheese; and most delicious was the repose that followed, enlivened with gay wit and free good humor, soothed by the fragrance of the exquisite cheroots, moistened by the last drops of the Ferintosh qualified by the crystal waters of the spring. After an hour's rest, we counted up our spoil; four ruffed grouse, nineteen woodcocks, with ten brace and a half of quail beside the bunny, made up our score — done comfortably in four hours.

'Now we have finished for to-day with quail,' said Harry, 'but we'll get full ten couple more of woodcock; come, let us be stirring; hang up your game-bag in the tree, and tie the setters to the fence; I want you in with me to beat, Tim; you two chaps must both keep the outside — you all the time, Tom; you, Frank, till you get to that tall thunder-shivered ash tree; turn in there, and follow up the margin of a wide slank you will see; but be careful, the mud is very deep, and dangerous in places; now then, here goes!'

And in he went, jumping a narrow streamlet into a point of thicket, through which he drove by main force. Scarce had he got six yards into the brake, before both spaniels quested; and, to my no small wonder, the jungle seemed alive with woodcock; eight or nine, at the least, flapped up at once, and skimmed along the tongue of coppice toward the high wood, which ran along the valley, as I learned afterward, for full three miles in length — while four or five more wheeled off to the sides, giving myself and Draw fair shots, by which we did not fail to profit; but I confess it was with absolute astonishment that I saw two of those turned over, which flew inward, killed by the marvellously quick and unerring aim of Archer, where a less thorough sportsman would have been quite unable to discharge a gun at all, so dense was the tangled jungle. Throughout the whole length of that skirt of coppice, a hundred and fifty yards, I should suppose at the utmost, the birds kept rising as it were incessantly — thirty-five, or, I think, nearly forty, being flushed in less than twenty minutes, although comparatively few were killed, partly from the difficulty of the ground, and partly from their getting up by fours and fives at once. Into the high wood, however, at the last we drove them; and there, till daylight failed us, we did our work like men. By the cold light of the full moon we wended homeward, rejoicing in the possession of twenty-six couple and a half of cock, twelve brace of quail — we found another bevy on our way home and bagged three birds almost by moonlight — five ruffed grouse, and a rabbit. Before our wet clothes were well changed, supper was ready, and a good blow-out was followed by sound slumbers and sweet dreams, fairly earned by nine hours of incessant walking.

VI

TOM DRAW'S VISIT TO PINE BROOK

'Frank Forester'

1845

THE long cold winter had passed away and been succeeded by the usual alternations of damp sloppy thaws, and piercing eastern gales, which constitute a North American Spring; and now the croaking of the bull-frogs, heard from every pool and puddle, the bursting buds of the young willows, and, above all, the appearance of Shad in market, announced to the experienced sportsman, the arrival of the English Snipe upon the marshes. For some days Harry Archer had been busily employed in overhauling his shooting apparatus, exercising his setters, watching every change of wind, and threatening a speedy expedition into the meadows of New Jersey, so soon as three days of easterly rain should be followed by mild weather from the southward. Anxiously looked for, and long desired, at last the eastern storm set in, cold, chilling, misty, with showers of smoky driving rain, and Harry for two entire days had rubbed his hands in ecstasy; while Timothy stood ever in the stable door — his fists plunged deep in the recesses of his breeches' pockets and a queer smile illuminating the honest ugliness of his bluff visage — patiently watching for a break in the dull clouds — his harness hanging the while in readiness for instant use, with every crest and turret as bright as burnished gold; his wagon all prepared, with bear-skins and top-coats displayed; and his own kit packed up in prompt anticipation of the first auspicious moment. The third dark morning had dawned dingily; the rain still drifted noiselessly against the windows, while gutters overflowed, and kennels swollen into torrents announced its volume and duration. There was not then the least temptation to stir out of doors, and, sulky myself, I was employed in coaxing a sulky cigar beside a yet more sulky fire, with an empty coffee-cup and a large quarto volume of Froissart upon the table at my elbow, when a quick cheery triple rap at the street door announced a visitor, and was succeeded instantly by a firm rapid footstep on the stairs, accompanied by multitudinous pattering and whimpering of spaniels. Without the ceremony of a knock the door flew open; and in marched, with his hat on one side, a dirty looking letter in his hand, and Messrs. Dan and Flash at his heel, the renowned Harry Archer.

'Here's a lark, Frank,' exclaimed that worthy, pitching the billet down upon the table, and casting himself into an armchair: 'Old Tom is to be here to-day to dinner, and wants to go with us to the snipe meadow. So we will dine, if it so please you, at my house at three — I have invited Mac to join us — and start directly after for Pine Brook.'

'The devil!' I responded, somewhat energetically; 'what, in this rain?'

'Rain — yes, indeed. The wind has hauled already to the westward of the south, and we shall have a starlight night, and a clear day to-morrow, and grand sport, I'll warrant you! Rain — yes! I'm glad it does rain; it will keep cockney gunners off the meadows.'

'But will Tom really be here? How do you know it? Have you seen him?'

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THE SPORTSMAN

From an engraving in 'Graham's Magazine'
after a painting by J. F. Lewis

'Read — read, man!' he responded, lighting the while a dark cheroot, and lugging out my gun-case to inspect its traps. And I in due obedience took up the billet-doux, which had produced this notable combustion. It was a thin, dirty, oblong letter, written across the lines upon ruled paper, with a pencil, wafered, and stamped with a key, and bearing in round school-boy characters the following direction:

for Mr. Harrye Archere Newe Yorke Esqre
69 Merceye streete.

Internally it ran —

Olde friende

havin to git some grocerees down to Yorke, I reckons to quit here on Satterdaye, and so be i can fix it counts to see you tewsdaye for sartin. quaile promises to be considerable plentye, and cocke has come on most ongodly thicke, i was down to Sam Blainses one night a fortnite since and heerd a heape on them a drumminge and chatteringe everywheres round aboute. if snipes is come on yit i reckon i could git awaye a daye or soe down into Jarsey ways — no more at preasente from

ever youre old friende
Thomas Drawe

i shall look in at Merceye streete bout three oclocke dinner time i guess.

'Well! that matter seems to be settled,' answered I, when I had finished the perusal of this most notable epistle. 'I suppose he will be here to the fore!'

'Sartain!' responded Archer, grinning; 'and do you for once, if possible — which I suppose it is not — be in time for dinner; I will not wait five minutes, and I shall give you a good feed; pack up your traps, and Tim shall call for them at two. We dine at three, mind! Start from my door at half-past five so as to get across in the six o'clock boat. Hard will be looking out for us, I know, about this time, at Pine Brook; and we shall do it easy in three hours, for the roads will be heavy. Come along, dogs. Good bye, Frank. Three o'clock!

now don't be late, there's a good lad. Here Flash! here Dan!' and gathering his Macintosh about him, exit Harry.

Thereupon to work I went with a will; rummaged up gun, cleaning-rod, copper-caps, powder-horns, shot-pouch, and all the et ceteras of shooting, which — being always stowed away with so much care at the end of one season, that they are undiscoverable at the beginning of the next — are sources of eternal discomfiture to those most all-accomplished geniuses, high sportsmen's servants: got out and greased my fen boots with the fit admixture of tallow, tar, beeswax, and Venice turpentine; hunted up shooting jacket, corduroys, plaid waistcoat, and check shirts; and, in fact, perpetrated the detested task of packing, barely in time for Timothy, who, as he shouldered my portmanteau, and hitched up the waistband of his own most voluminous unmentionables, made out in the midst of grins and nods, and winks, to deliver himself to the following effect —

'Please, sur, measter says, if you ple-ase to moind three o't clock — for he'll be dommed, he said, please Measter Forester, av he waits haaf a minit ——'

'Very well, Tim, very well — that'll do — I'll be ready.'

'And Measter Draw be coom'd tew — nay but Ay do think 'at he's fatter noo than iver — ecod, Ayse laff to see him doon i' t' mossy meadows laike — he'll swear, Ayse warrant him.'

And with a burst of merriment, that no one pair of mortal lips save Timothy's alone could ever have accomplished, he withdrew, leaving me to complete my toilet; in which, believe me, gentle reader, mindful of a good feed and of short law, I made no needless tarrying.

The last stroke of the hour appointed had not yet stricken when I was on the steps of Harry's well-known snug two-storied domicile; in half a minute more I was at my ease in his study, where, to my no small wonder, I found myself alone, with no other employment than to survey, for the nine hundredth time the adornments of that exquisite model for that most snug of all things, a cozy bachelor's peculiar snuggery. It was a small back room, with two large windows looking out upon a neatly trimmed grass-plat bordered with lilacs and laburnums; its area, of sixteen feet by fourteen, was strewn with a rich Turkey carpet, and covered with every appurtenance for luxury and comfort that could be brought into its limits without encumbering its brief dimensions. A bright steel grate, with a brilliant fire of Cannel coal, occupied the centre of the south side, facing the entrance, while a superb book-case and secretaire of exquisite mahogany filled the recess on either hand of it, their glass doors showing an assortment, handsomely bound, of some eight hundred volumes, classics, and history, and the gems of modern poesie and old romance. Above the mantel-piece, where should have hung the mirror, was a wide case, covering the whole front of the pier, with doors of plate glass, through which might be discovered, supported on a rack of ebony, and set off by a background of rich crimson velvet, the select armory, prized above all his earthly goods by their enthusiastic owner — consisting of a choice pair of twin London-made double-barrels, a short splendidly finished ounce-ball rifle, a heavy single pigeon gun, a pair of genuine Kuchenreuter's nine-inch duelling pistols, and a smaller pair by Joe Manton, for the belt or pocket — all in the most perfect order, and ready for immediate use. Facing this case upon the opposite wall, along the whole length of which ran a divan, or wide low sofa, of crimson damask, hung two oil paintings, originals by Edward Landseer, of dogs — hounds, terriers, and all, in fact, of canine race, mongrels of low degree alone excepted — under these were suspended, upon brackets, two long duck guns, and an array of tandem and four-horse whips, besides two fly-rods, and a cherry-stick Persian pipe, ten feet at least in length. The space between the windows was occupied by two fine engravings, one of the Duke of Wellington, the other of Sir Walter in his study — Harry's political and literary idols; a library centre table, with an inkstand of costly buhl, covered with periodicals and papers, and no less than four sumptuous arm-chairs of divers forms and patterns, completed the appointments of the room; but the picture still would be incomplete, were I to pass over a huge tortoise-shell Tom Cat, which dozed upon the rug in amicable vicinity to our old friends the spaniels Dan and Flash. It did not occupy me quite so long to take a survey of these well-remembered articles, as it has done to describe them; nor, in fact, had that been the case should I have found the time to reconnoitre them; for scarcely was I seated by the fire, before the ponderous trampling of Old Tom might be heard on the stair-case, as in vociferous converse with our host he came down from the chamber, wherein, by some strange process of persuasion assuredly peculiar to himself, Harry had forced him to go through the ceremony of ablution, previous to his attack upon the viands, which were in truth not likely to be dealt with more mercifully in consequence of this delay. Another moment, and they entered — 'Arcades ambo' duly rigged for the occasion — Harry in his neat claret-colored jockey-coat, white waistcoat, corduroys and gaiters — Tom in Canary-colored vest, sky-blue dress coat with huge brass buttons, gray kerseymere unmentionables, with his hair positively brushed, and his broad jolly face clean shaved, and wonderfully redolent of soap and water. The good old soul's face beamed with unfeigned delight, and grasping me affectionately by the hand ——

'How be you?' he exclaimed — 'How be you, Forester — you looks well, anyways.'

'Why, I am well, Tom,' responded I, 'but I shall be better after I've had that drink that Archer's getting ready — you're dry, I fancy ——'

'Sartain!' was the expected answer; and in a moment the pale Amontillado sherry and the bitters were paraded — but no such darned washy stuff, as he termed it, would the old

Trojan look at, much less taste; and Harry was compelled to produce the liquor stand, well stored with potent waters, when at the nick of time McTavish entered in full fig for a regular slap-up party, not knowing at all whom he had been asked to meet. Not the least discomposed, however, that capital fellow was instantly at home, and as usual, up to every sort of fun.

'What, Draw,' said he, 'who the devil thought of seeing you here — when did you come down? Oh! the dew, certainly,' he continued, in reply to Archer, who was pressing a drink on him — 'the mountain dew for me — catch a Highlander at any other dram, when Whasky's to the fore — ay, Tom?'

'Catch you at any dram, exceptin' that what's strongest. See to him now!' as Mac tossed off his modicum, and smacked his lips approvingly; 'see to him now! I'd jist as lief drink down so much fire, and he pours it in — pours it in, jist like as one it was mother's milk to the darned critter.'

'Ple-ase Sur, t' dinner's re-ady,' announced Timothy, throwing open the folding doors, and displaying the front room, with a beautiful fire blazing, and a good old fashioned round table covered with exquisite white damask-linen, and laid with four covers, each flanked by a most unusual display of glasses — a mighty bell-mouthed rummer, namely, on a tall slender stock with a white spiral line running up through the centre, an apt substitute for that most awkward of all contrivances, the ordinary champagne glass — a beautiful green hock goblet, with a wreath of grapes and vine leaves wrought in relief about the rim — a massy water tumbler elaborately diamond-cut — and a capacious sherry-glass so delicate and thin that the slender crystal actually seemed to bend under the pressure of your lips; nor were the liquors wanting in proportion — two silver wine-coolers, all frosted over with the exudations from the ice within, displayed the long necks of a champagne flask and a bottle of Johannisbergher, and four decanters hung out their labels of Port, Madeira, brown Sherry, and Amontillado — while two or three black, copper-wired bottles, in the chimney-corner, announced a stock of heavy-wet, for such as should incline to malt. I had expected from Tom's lips some preternatural burst of wonder at this display of preparation, the like of which, as I conceived, had never met his eyes before — but, whether he had been indoctrinated by previous feeds at Harry's hospitable board, or had learned by his own native wit the difficult lesson of nil admirari, he sat down without any comment, though he stared a little wildly, when he saw nothing eatable upon the table, except a large dish of raw oysters, flanked by a lemon and a cruet of cayenne. With most ineffable disdain he waved off the plate which Tim presented to him, with a 'Consarn you, I arnt a goin to give my belly cold with no such chillin' stuff as that. I'd like to know now, Archer, if this bees all that you're a goin' to give us — for if so be it is, I'll go stret down to the nigger's yonder, and git me a beef steak and onions?'

'Why, not exactly, Tom,' responded Archer, when he could speak for laughing — 'these are merely for a whet to give us an appetite.'

'A blamed queer sort of wet, I think — why I'd have thought that ere rum, what McTavish took, would have been wet enough, till what time as you got at the champagne — and, as for appetite, I reckon now a man whose guts is always cravin — cravin — like yours be, had better a taken somethin' dry to keep it down like, than a wet to moisten it up more.'

By this time the natives, which had so moved Tom's indignation, were succeeded by a tureen of superb mutton broth, to which the old man did devote himself most assiduously — while Mac was loud in approbation of the brouse, saying it only wanted bannocks to be perfection.

'Cuss you, you're niver satisfied, you ain't,' Tom had commenced, when he was cut short by 'The Sherry round —

Tim' — from our host — 'you'd better take the brown, Tom, it's the strongest!' The old man thrust his rummer forth, as being infinitely the biggest, and — Timothy persisting in pouring out the strong and fruity sherry into the proper glass — burst out again indignantly —

'I'd be pleased to know, Archer, now, why you puts big glasses on the table, if you don't mean they should be drinked out of — to tantalize a chap, I reckon' — down went the wine at one gulp, and the exquisite aroma conquered — he licked his lips, sighed audibly, smiled, grinned, then laughed aloud. 'I see — I see,' he said at last; 'you reckon it's too prime to be drinked out of big ones — and I dun' know but you're right too — but what on airthe is we to drink out of these — not water, that I know! leastways, I niver see none in this house, no how.'

'The green one is for brandy, Tom!' McTavish answered.

'Ey, ey!' Tom interrupted him, 'and they makes them green, I guess, so as no one shall see how much a body takes — now that's what I does call genteel!'

'And this large plain one,' added Mac, looking as grave as a judge, and lifting one of the huge champagne glasses — 'is a dram glass for drinking Scotch whiskey — what they call in the Highlands a thimblefull ——'

'They take it as a medicine there, you see, Tom,' continued Archer; 'a preventive to a disease well known in those parts, called the Scotch fiddle — did you ever hear of it?'

'Carnt say,' responded Tom; 'what like is't?'

'Oh, Mac will tell you, he suffers from it sadly — didn't you see him tuck in the specific — it was in compliment to him I had the thimbles set out to-day.'

'Oh! that's it, ay?' the fat man answered. 'Well, I don't care if I do' — in answer to Harry's inquiry whether he would take some boiled shad, which, with caper sauce, had replaced the soup — 'I don't care if I do — shad isn't got to Newburgh yet, leastways I harnt seen none ——'

Well might he say that, by the way, for they had scarce appeared in New York, and were attainable now only at the moderate rate of something near their weight in silver. After the fish, a dram of Ferintosh was circulated in one small glass, exquisitely carved into the semblance of a thistle, which Draw disposed of with no comment save passing wonder that when men could get applejack, they should be willing to take up with such smoky trash as that.

A saddle of roast mutton, which had been hanging, Harry said, six weeks, a present from that excellent good fellow, the Captain of the Swallow, followed, and with it came the split-corks — 'By heavens,' I cried, almost involuntarily — 'what a superb champagne' — suffering, after the interjection, something exceeding half a pint of that delicious, dry, high-flavored, and rich-bodied nectar, to glide down my gullet.

'Yes' — answered Harry — 'yes — alack! that it should be the last! This is the last but one of the first importation of the Crown — no such wine ever came before into this country, no such has followed it. We shall discuss the brace to-day — what better opportunity? Here is McTavish, its originator, the best judge in the land! Frank Forester, who has sipped of the like at Crockie's, and a place or two beside, which we could mention — myself, who am not slow at any decent tipple, and Thomas Draw, who knows it, I suppose, from Jarsey Cider!'

'Yes, and I knows it from the Jarsey champagne tew — which you stick into poor chaps, what you fancies doesn't know no better — give me some more of that ere mutton and some jelly — you are most darned sparin' of your jelly now — and Timothy, you snoopin rascal, fill this ere thimbleful agin with Creawn wine!'

Wild fowl succeeded, cooked to a turn, hot claret duly qualified with cayenne in a sauce-boat by their side — washed down by the last flask of Mac's champagne, of which the last round we quaffed sorrowfully, as in duty bound, to the importer's health, and to the memory of the crowned head departed — the only crown, as Harry in his funeral oration, truly and pithily observed, which gives the lie to the assertion that 'uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.'

No womanish display of pastry marred the unity of this most solemn masculine repast, a Stilton cheese, a red herring, with Goshen butter, pilot bread, and porter, concluded the rare banquet. A plate of devilled biscuit, and a magnum of Latour, furnished forth the dessert, which we discussed right jovially; while Timothy, after removing Harry's guns from their post of honor above the mantel-piece to their appropriate cases, stole away to the stable to prepare his cattle.

'Now, boys,' said Harry, 'make the most of your time. There is the claret, the best in my opinion going — for I have always prized Mac's black-sealed Latour far above Lynch's Margaux — yes, even above that of '25. For Lynch's wine, though exquisitely delicate, was perilous thin; I never tasted it without assenting to Serjeant Bothwell's objection, "Claret's ower cauld for my stamach," and desiring like him to qualify it "wi' a tass of eau de vie." Now this wine has no such fault, it has a body ——'

'I don't know, Archer,' interrupted Tom, 'what that ere sarjeant meant with his darned o di vee, but I know now that I'd a cussed sight rayther have a drink o' brandy, or the least mite of applejack, than a whole keg of this ere rot-gut!'

'You've hit the nail on the head, Tom,' answered I, while Harry, knowing the old man's propensities, marched off in search of the liquor-stand — 'It was brandy that the serjeant meant!'

'Then why the thunder didn't he say brandy, like a man — instead of coming out with his snivilling o di vee?'

'Why, Tom,' said I, in explanation, 'he admired your favorite drink so much, that he used the French name as most complimentary; it means water of life!'

'What, he watered it too, did he? I thought he must be a darned poor drinkin' man, to call things out of their right names — precious little of the raal stuff had he ever drinked, I reckon, watered or not — o di vee! Cuss all such Latin trash, says I. But here 't comes. Take a drop, doo, McTavish, it's better fifty times, and healthier tew, than that eternal darned sour old vinegar, take a drop, doo!'

'Thank you, no,' answered McTavish, well contented with his present beverage, and after a pause went on addressing Archer — 'I wish to heaven you'd let me know what you were up to — I'd have gone along.'

'What hinders you from going now?' said Harry. 'I can rig you out for the drive, and we can stop at the Carlton, and get your gun, and the rest of your traps. I wish to the Lord you would!'

'Oh! oh!' Tom burst out, on the instant, 'oh! oh! I won't go, sartain, less so be McTavish concludes on going tew — we carn't do nothing without him.'

It was in vain, however, that we all united in entreating him to go along — he had business to do to-morrow — he was afraid of getting his feet wet, and fifty other equally valid excuses, till Harry exclaimed — 'It's no use, I can tell you Donald's bluid's up, and there's an end of it ——'

Whereat McTavish laughed, saying that he did not think, for a very short-sighted man, snipe-shooting up to his waist in water, and up to his knees in mud, was the great thing it is cracked up to be, filled himself a pretty sufficient dose of hot toddy, and drank to our good luck. Just at this moment, up rattled, ready packed, with the dogs in, the gun-cases stowed, and store of top-coats, capes, and bear-skins, all displayed, the wagon to the door.

'I need not tell you, Mac,' cried Archer, as he wrung the gallant Celt by the hand, 'to make yourself at home — we must be off, you know'; — then opening the window, 'hand in those coats, Timothy, out of that drizzling rain — I thought you had more sense.'

'Nay, then, they're no but just coom fra under t' approns,' responded Tim, not over and above delighted at the reflection on his genius — 'they're droy as booans, Ayse warrant um.'

'Well! hand them in then — hand them in — where's your coat, Tom? — that's it; now look here, buckle on the cape of mine over your shoulders, and take this India-rubber hood, and tie it over your hat, and you may laugh at four-and-twenty-hours' rain, let alone two. You have got toggery enough, Frank, I conclude — so here goes for myself.' Whereupon he indued, first a pea-jacket of extra pilot-cloth, and a pair of English mud-boots, buttoning to the mid-thigh; and, above these, a regular box coat of stout blue dreadnought, with half a dozen capes; an oil-skin covered hat, with a curtain to protect his neck and ears, fastening with a hook and eye under the chin, completing his attire. In we got, thereupon, without more ado. Myself and Timothy, with the two setters, in the box-seat behind, the leathern apron unrolled and buttoned up, over a brace of buffalo robes, hairy side inward, to our middles — Harry and Tom in front, with a superb black bear-skin drawn up by a ring and strap to the centre of the back rail between them, and the patent waterproof apron hooked up to either end of the seat — the effeminacy of umbrellas we despised — our cigars lighted, and our bodies duly muffled up, off we went, at a single chirrup of our driver, whose holly four-horse whip stood in the socket by his side unheeded, as with his hands ungloved, and his beautiful, firm, upright seat upon the box, he wheeled off at a gentle trot, the good nags knowing their master's hand and voice, as well as if they had been his children, and obeying them far better.

Our drive, it must be admitted, through the heavy rain was nothing to brag of. Luckily, however, before we had got over much more than half our journey, the storm gradually ceased, as the night fell; and, by the time we reached the big swamp, it was clear all over the firmament; with a dark, dark blue sky, and millions of stars twinkling gayly — and the wind blowing freshly but pleasantly out of the nor-norwest.

'Did I not tell you so, boys?' exclaimed Archer, joyously pointing with his whip to the bright skies — 'we'll have a glorious day to-morrow.' Just as he spoke, we reached the little toll-gate by the Morris Canal; and, as we paused to change a fifty cent piece, what should we hear, high in air, rapidly passing over our heads, but the well-known 'skeap! skeap?' the thin shrill squeak of unnumbered snipe, busy in their nocturnal voyage; and within an hour thereafter we arrived at our journey's end, where a glass all round of tip-top champagne brandy — a neat snug supper of capital veal cutlets, ham and eggs and pork steaks and sausages, finished the day, and tired enough, we went to bed early and dreamed.

'What sort of a morning is it, Timothy?' asked I, rubbing my eyes, as I sat bolt upright in bed on the irruption of that fidus Achates, some half hour before sunrise, into my little dormitory; 'What sort of morning is it?'

'A varry bonny mornin, Measter Frank,' responded he; 'there was a leetle tooch o' whaite frost aboot midnaight, but sin' t' moon set, there's been a soop o' warm ra-ain, and it's dooll noo, and saft loike, wi' t' wind sootherly — but it's boon to be nooght at all, Ayse warrant it. T' soon'll be oot enoo — see if he beant — and t' snaipe'll laie laike steans. Ayse awa noo, and fetch t' het watter — t' veal cootlets is i' t' pann, and John Van Dyne he's been a wa-aiting iver sin 't got laight.'

'That's not very long, then,' answered I, springing out of bed, 'at all events; for it's as dark as pitch now; bring me a candle, I can't shave by this light; there! leave the door into the parlor open, and tell John to come in and amuse me while I'm shaving. Is Mr. Archer up?'

'Oop? Weel Ay wot he is oop; and awa wi' Measter Draa, and t' lang goons, doon to t' brigg; to watch t' doocks flay, but Van Dyne says t' doocks has dean flaying.'

'Yes, yes — they'se quit sartain,' answered a merry voice without, and in stalked John, the best fowl-shot, the best snipe-marker, the best canoe-paddler, and the best fellow every way, in New Jersey.

'How are you, John? — any birds on the piece?'

'Nicely!' he answered, to my first query — 'nicely,' — shaking me warmly by the hand, and, after a pause, added, 'I can't say as there be; the Piece is too wet altogether!'

'Too wet — aye? that's bad, John!'

'Lord, yes — too wet entirely; I was half over it with the canoe last week, and didn't see — no not half a dozen, and they was round the edges like, where there wasn't no good lying; there was a heap o' yellow legs, though, and a smart chance o' plover.'

'Oh, hang the plover, John; but shall we find no snipe?'

'Not upon neither of the Pieces, no how — but there was heaps of them a flyin' over all last night; yes! yes! I guess Archer and I can fix it so as we'll git a few — but, do tell, who's that darned fat chap as I see goin' down ——'

Here he was interrupted by the distant report of a heavy gun, followed almost upon the instant by a second.

'Ding!' he exclaimed, 'but there's a flight now! ar'n't there? I guess now, Mr. Forester, I'd as well jist run down with old Shot, leastwise he'll fetch um, if so be they've fallen in the water.'

'Do! do!' cried I, 'by all means, John; and tell them to come back directly; for half the breakfast's on the table, and I'll be ready by the time they're here.'

By the time I had got my jacket on, and while I was in the act of pulling up my long fen boots before the cheerful fire, I perceived by the clack of tongues without, that the sportsmen had returned; and the next moment Harry entered, accompanied by Fat Tom in his glory, with no less than two couple and a half of that most beautiful and delicate of wild fowl, the green-winged teal.

'That's not so bad, Frank,' exclaimed Harry, depositing, as he spoke, his heavy single-barrel in the chimney-corner, and throwing himself into an arm-chair; 'that's not so bad for ten minutes' work, is it?'

'Better, a darned sight,' Tom chimed in, 'than laying snoozin till the sun is high; but that's tha way with these etarnal drinkin men, they does keep bright just so long as they keeps a liquorin; but when that's done with, you don't hear nothin more of them till noon, or arter. Cuss all sich drunken critters.'

'That's a devilish good one,' answered I; 'the deuce a one of you has shaved, or for that matter, washed his face, to the best of my belief; and then, because you tumble out of bed like Hottentots, and rush out, gun in hand, with all the accumulated filth of a hard day's drive, and a long night's sweat, reeking upon you, you abuse a Christian gentleman, who gets up soberly, and dresses himself decently — for idleness and what not!'

'Soberly!' answered Tom; — 'Soberly! Jest hear, now Harry, — Soberly! — jest like as though he hadn't a had his bitters, and blamed bitter bitters, too!'

'Not a drop, upon honor,' I replied; 'not a drop this morning!'

'What? — oh! oh! that's the reason, then, why you're so 'tarnal cross. Here, landlord, bring us in them cider sperrits — I harnt had only a small taste myself — take a drink, Frank, and you'll feel slick as silk to rights, I tell you.'

'Thank you, no!' said I, falling foul of the veal cutlets delicately fried in batter with collops of ham interspersed, for which my worthy host is justly celebrated — 'thank you, no! bitters are good things in their way, but not when breakfast treads so close upon the heels of them!'

'Tak a soop, Measter Frank — tak a soop, sur!' exhorted

Timothy, who was bearing a salver laden with tumblers, the decanter gracing his better hand. 'Tak a soop, thou'lt be all t' betther for 't enoo. Measter Draa 's i' t' roight o' 't. It's varry good stooff Ayse oophaud it.'

'I don't doubt that at all, Tim; natheless I'll be excused just now.'

I was soon joined at the table by the fat man and Archer, who were so busily employed in stowing away what Sir Dugald Dalgetty terms provant, that few words passed between us. At length when the furor edendi was partially suppressed: 'Now then, John,' said Harry, 'we are going to be here two days — to-morrow, that is, and to-day — what are we to beat, so as to get ground for both days? Begin with the long meadow, I suppose, and beat the vlies toward the small piece home, and finish here before the door.'

'That's it, I reckon,' answered the jolly Dutchman, 'but you knows pretty nigh as well as I can tell you.'

'Better, John, better, if I knew exactly how the ground was — but that will be the driest, won't it?'

'Sartain,' replied the other, 'but we'll get work enough without beating the ground hereaways before the house; we'll keep that to begin to-morrow, and so follow up the big meadow, and to Loises, and all along under the widow Mulford's, if it holds dry to-day; and somehow now I kind o' guess it will. There'll be a heap o' birds there by to-morrow — they were aflyin' cur'ous, now, last night, I tell you.'

'Well, then, let us be moving. Where's the game-bag, Timothy? Give it to John! Is the brandy bottle in it, and the luncheon? Hey?'

'Ay, ay! Sur!' answered Tim; 't' brandy 's t' big wicker bottle, wi' t' tin cup — and soom cauld pork and crackers i' t' gam bag — and a spare horn of powder, wi' a pund in 't. Here, tak it, John Van Dyne, and mooch good may 't do ye — and — haud a bit, man! here's t' dooble shot belt, sling it across your shoulder, and awa wi' you.'

Everything being now prepared, and having ordered dinner to be in readiness at seven, we lighted our cigars and started; Harry, with the two setters trotting steadily at his heels, and his gun on his shoulder, leading the way at a step that would have cleared above five miles an hour, I following at my best pace, Tom Draw puffing and blowing like a grampus in shoal water, and John Van Dyne swinging along at a queer loping trot behind me. We crossed the bridges and the causeway by which we had arrived the previous night, passed through the toll-gate, and, turning short to the right hand, followed a narrow sandy lane for some three quarters of a mile, till it turned off abruptly to the left, crossing a muddy streamlet by a small wooden bridge. Here Harry paused, flung the stump of his cheroot into the ditch, and dropping the butt of his gun, began very quietly to load, I following his example without saying a word.

'Here we are, Frank,' said he; 'this long stripe of rushy fields, on both sides of the ditch, is what they call the long meadow, and rare sport have I had on it in my day, but I'm afraid it's too wet now — we'll soon see, though,' and he strode across the fence, and waved the dogs off to the right and left. 'You take the right hand, Frank; and Tom, keep you the ditch bank, all the way; the ground is firmest there; we've got the wind in our favor; a little farther off, Frank, they won't lie hard for an hour or two, at all events; and I don't believe we shall find a bird before we cross the next fence.'

Heads up and sterns down, off raced the fleet setters, beating the meadows fairly from the right hand fence to the ditch, crossing each other in mid course, and quartering the ground superbly — but nothing rose before them, nor did their motions indicate the slightest taint of scent upon the dewy herbage. The ground, however, contrary to Harry's expectations, was in prime order — loose, loamy, moist, black soil, with the young tender grass of spring shooting up everywhere, bright, succulent and sweet; tall tufts of rushes here and there, and patches of brown flags, the reliques of the by-gone year, affording a sure shelter for the timid waders. The day was cool and calm, with a soft mellow light — for the sun was curtained, though not hidden, by wavy folds of gauze-like mist — and a delicious softness in the mild western breeze, before which we were wending our way, as every one who would bag snipe, must do, down wind. We crossed the second fence; the ground was barer, wetter, splashy in places, and much poached by the footsteps of the cattle, which had been pastured there last autumn. See, the red dog has turned off at a right angle from his course; he lifts his head high, straightens his neck and snuffs the air slackening his pace to a slow, guarded trot, and waving his stern gently — Chase sees him, pauses, almost backs!

'Look to, Frank — there's a bird before him!'

Sheap! skeap! skeap! — up they jumped eighty yards off at least, as wild as hawks; skimming the surface of the meadow, and still by their shrill squeak calling up other birds to join them till seven or eight were on the wing together then up they rose clearly defined against the sky, and wheeled in short zigzags above the plain, as if uncertain whither they should fly, till at length they launched off straight to the right hand, and after a flight of a full mile, pitched suddenly and steeply down behind a clump of newly budding birches.

'I knows where them jokers be, Mr. Archer'; exclaimed Van Dyne.

'In heaven, I guess they be,' responded Master Draw; 'leastwise they flew far enough to be there, anyhow!'

'No, no! Tom, they've not gone so very far,' said Archer, 'and there's good lying for them there, I shall be satisfied if they all go that way. To ho! to ho!' he interrupted himself, for the dogs had both come to a dead point among some tall flags; and Shot's head cocked on one side, with his nose pointed directly downward, and his brow furrowed into a knotty frown, showed that the bird was under his very feet. 'Come up, Tom — come up, you old sinner — don't you see Shot's got a snipe under his very nose?'

'Well! well! I sees,' answered Tom; 'I sees it, darn you! but give a fellow time, you'd best, in this etarnal miry mud-hole!' and, sinking mid leg deep at every step, the fat man floundered on, keeping, however, his gun ever in position, and his keen quick eye steadily fixed on the stanch setter.

'Are you ready, now? I'll flush him,' exclaimed Harry, taking a step in advance; and instantly up sprang the bird, with his sharp, thrice-repeated cry, and a quick flutter of his wings, almost straight into the air over the head of Tom, striving to get the wind.

Bang! Draw's first barrel was discharged, the snipe being at that moment scarce ten feet from the muzzle, the whole load going like a bullet, of course harmlessly! — his second followed, but like the first in vain; for the bird, having fairly weathered him, was flying very fast, and twisting all the time, directly up wind. Then Harry's gun was pitched up, and the trigger drawn almost before the butt was at his shoulder. Down went the bird; slanting away six yards, though killed stone dead, in the direction of his former flight, so rapidly had he been going, when the shot struck him.

'Mark! mark!' I shouted, 'Harry. Mark! mark! behind you!' As three more birds took wing, before the red dog, and were bearing off, too far from me, to the right hand, like those which had preceded them. I had, when I cried 'mark,' not an idea that he could possibly have killed one; for he had turned already quite round in his tracks, to shoot the first bird, and the others had risen wild, in the first place, and were now forty yards off at the least; but quick as thought he wheeled again, cocking his second barrel in the very act of turning, and sooner almost than I could imagine the possibility of his even catching sight of them, a second snipe was fluttering down wing-tipped.

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SNIPE SHOOTING
From an old print

'Beautiful, beautiful indeed,' I cried, involuntarily; 'the quickest and the cleanest double-shot I have seen in many a day.'

'It warnt so darned slow, no how,' replied Tom, somewhat crest-fallen, as he re-loaded his huge demi-cannon.

'Slow! you old heathen! if you could shoot better than a boy five years old, we should have had three birds — I could have got two of those last just as well as not, if you had knocked the first down like a Christian sportman — but look! look at those devils,' Harry went on, pointing towards the birds, which had gone off, and at which he had been gazing all the time; 'confound them, they're going to drum!'

And so indeed they were; and for the first time in my life I beheld a spectacle, which I had heard of indeed, but never had believed fully, till my own eyes now witnessed it. The two birds, which had been flushed, mounted up! up! scaling the sky in short small circles, till they were quite as far from this dull earth, as the lark, when 'at heaven's gate he sings' — and then dropt plumb down, as it would seem, fifty feet in an instant, with a strange drumming sound, which might be heard for a mile or more. Then up they soared again, and again repeated their manœuvre; while at each repetition of the sound another and another bird flew up from every part of the wide meadow, and joined those in mid ether; till there must have been, at the least reckoning, forty snipe soaring and drumming within the compass of a mile, rendering the whole air vocal with that strange quivering hum, which has been stated by some authors — and among these by the ingenious and observant Gilbert White — to be ventriloquous; although it is now pretty generally — and probably with justice — conceded to be the effect of a vibratory motion of the quill feathers set obliquely, so as to make the air whistle through them. For above an hour did this wild work continue; not a bird descending from its 'bad eminence,' but, on the contrary, each one that we flushed out of distance, for they would not lie to the dogs at all, rising at once to join them. 'We have no chance,' said Harry, 'no chance at all of doing anything, unless the day changes, and the sun gets out hot, which I fear it won't. Look out, Tom, watch that beggar to your right there; he has done drumming and is going to 'light'; and with the word, sheer down he darted some ninety yards from the spot where we stood, till he was scarce three feet above the marsh; when he wheeled off, and skimmed the flat, uttering a sharp harsh clatter, entirely different from any sound I ever heard proceed from a snipe's bill before, though in wild weather in the early spring time I have heard it since, full many a day. The cry resembled more the cackling of a hen, which has just laid an egg, than any other sound I can compare it to; and consisted of a repetition some ten times in succession of the syllable kek, so hard and jarring that it was difficult to believe it the utterance of so small a bird. But if I was surprised at what I heard, what was I, when I saw the bird alight on the top rail of a high snake fence, and continue there five or ten minutes, when it dropped down into the long marsh grass. Pointing toward the spot where I had marked it, I was advancing stealthily, when Archer said, 'You may try if you like, but I can tell you that you won't get near him!' I persevered, however, and fancied I should get within long shot, but Harry was quite right; for he rose again skeap! skeap! and went off as wild as ever, towering as before, and drumming; but for a short time only, when, tired apparently of the long flight he had already taken, he stooped from his elevation with the same jarring chatter, and alighted — this time to my unmitigated wonder — upon the topmost spray of a large willow tree, which grew by the ditch side!

'It's not the least use — not the least — pottering after these birds now,' said Harry. 'We'll get on to the farther end of the meadows, where the grass is long, and where they may lie something better; and we'll beat back for these birds in the afternoon, if Dan Phœbus will but deign to shine out.'

On we went, therefore, Tom Draw swearing strange oaths at the birds, that acted so darnation cur'ous, and at myself and Harry for being such etarnal fools as to have brought him sweating into them darned stinkin mud-holes; and I, to say the truth, almost despairing of success. In half an hour's walking we did, however, reach some ground, which — yielding far more shelter to the birds, as being meadow-land not pastured, but covered with coarse rushy tussocks — seemed to promise something better in the way of sport; and before we had gone many yards beyond the first fence, a bird rose at long distance to Tom's right, and was cut down immediately by a quick snap shot of that worthy, on whose temper, and ability to shoot, the firmer ground and easier walking had already begun to work a miracle.

'Who says I can't shoot now, no more than a five-year old, cuss you!' he shouted, dropping the butt of his gun deliberately, when skeap! skeap! startled by the near report, two more snipe rose within five yards of him! — fluttered he was assuredly, and fully did I expect to see a clear miss — but he refrained, took time, cocked his gun coolly, and letting the birds get twenty yards away, dropped that to his right hand, killed clean with his second barrel, while Harry doubled up the other in his accustomed style, I not having as yet got a chance of any bird.

'Down, charge!' said Harry; 'down, charge! Shot, you villain!' — for the last bird had fallen wing-tipped only, and was now making ineffectual attempts to rise, bouncing three or four feet from the ground, with his usual cry, and falling back again only to repeat his effort within five minutes — this proved too much, as it seemed, for the poor dog's endurance, so that, after rising once or twice uneasily, and sitting down again at his master's word, he drew on steadily, and began roading the running bird, regardless of the score which he might have been well aware he was running up against himself. During this business Chase had sat pretty quiet, though I observed a nervous twitching of ears, and a latent spark of the devil in his keen black eye, which led me to expect some mischief, so that I kept my gun all ready for immediate action; and well it was that I did so; for the next moment he dashed in, passing Shot, who was pointing steadily enough, and picked up the bird after a trifling scuffle, the result of which was that a couple more snipe were flushed wild by the noise. Without a moment's hesitation I let drive at them with both barrels, knocking the right hand snipe down very neatly; the left hand bird, however, pitched up a few feet just as I drew the trigger, and the consequence was that, as I fancied, I missed him clean.

'There! there! you stoopid, blundering, no-sich-thing — there! now who talks to me of missing!'

'Shut up! shut up! you most incorrigible old brute!' responded Harry, who had been steadily employed in marking the missed bird, as I deemed him. 'Shut up your stupid jaw! That snipe's as dead as the old cow you gave us for supper, the last time we slept at Warwick, though from a different cause; for the cow, Jem Flyn says, died of the murrain or some other foul rotten disorder; and that small winged fellow has got a very sufficient dose of blue pill to account for his decease! So shut up! and keep still while I take the change out of these confounded dogs, or we shall have every bird we get near to-day flushed like those two. Ha! Shot! Ha! Chase! Down cha-a-arge — down cha-a-arge — will you? will you? Down charge!'

And for about five minutes, nothing was heard upon the meadows but the resounding clang of the short heavy dog-whip, the stifled grunts of Shot, and the vociferous yells of Chase, under the merited and necessary chastisement.

'Down charge, now, will you?' he continued, as, pocketing his whip, he wiped his heated brow, picked up his gun, and proceeded to bag the scattered game. 'There! that job's done,' he said, 'and a job that I hate most confoundly it is —

but it must be done now and then; and the more severely, when necessary, the more mercifully!'

'Now that's what I doos call a right down lie,' the fat man interposed. 'You loves it, and you knows you do — you loves to lick them poor dumb brutes, cause they can't lick back, no how. You, Chase, darn you, quit mouthing that there snipe — quit mouthing it, I say — else I'll cut out the snoopin soul of you!'

'So much for Tom Draw's lecture upon cruelty to animals — that's what I call rich!' answered Harry. 'But come, let us get on. I marked that bird to a yard, down among those dwarf rose-bushes; and there we shall find, I'll be bound on it, good shooting. How very stupid of me not to think of that spot! You know, John, we always find birds there, when they can't be found anywhere else.'

On we went, after a re-invigorating cup of mountain dew, with spirits raised at the prospect of some sport at last, and as we bagged the snipe which — Harry was right — had fallen killed quite dead, the sun came out hot, broad, and full. The birds were lying thick among the stunted bushes and warm bubbling springs which covered, in this portion of the ground, some twenty acres of marsh meadow; and as the afternoon waxed warm, they lay right well before the dogs, which, having learned the consequences of misdemeanor, behaved with all discretion. We shot well! and the sport waxed so fast and furious, that till the shades of evening fell, we had forgotten — all the three — that our luncheon, saving the article of drams, was still untasted; and that, when we assembled at seven of the clock in Hard's cozy parlor, and shook out of bag and pocket our complement of sixty-three well-grown and well-fed snipe, we were in reasonable case to do good justice to a right good supper.

Breakfast concluded, the next morning we pulled our fen boots on, and on the instant up rattled Timothy, who had disappeared a few minutes before, with the well-known drag to the door, guns stowed away, dogs whimpering, and sticking out their eager noses between the railings of the box — game-bags well packed with lots of prog and of spare ammunition.

Away we rattled at a brisk pace, swinging round corner after corner, skilfully shaving the huge blocks of stone, and dexterously quartering the deep ravine-like ruts which grace the roads of Jersey — crossing two or three bridges over as many of those tributaries of the beautiful Passaic, which water this superb snipe-country — and reaching at least a sweep of smooth level road parallel to a long tract of meadows under the widow Mulford's. And here, mort de ma vie! that was a shot from the snipe-ground, and right on our beat, too — Ay! there are two guns, three, pointers! — liver and white a brace, and one all liver.

'I know them,' Harry said, 'I know them, good shots and hard walkers both, but a little too much of the old school — a little too much of the twaddle and potter system. Jem Tickler, there, used, when I landed here, to kill as many birds as any shot out of the city — though even then the Jersey boys, poor Ward and Harry T—— gave him no chance; but now heaven help him! Fat Tom here would get over more ground, and bag more snipe, too, in a day! The other is a canny Scot, I have forgot his name, but he shoots well and walks better. Never mind! we can outshoot them, I believe; and I am sure we can outmanœuvre them. Get away! get away, Bob,' as he flanked the near-side horse under the collar on the inside — 'get away you thief — we must forereach on them.' Away we went another mile, wheeled short to the left hand through a small bit of swampy woodland, and over a rough causeway, crossing a narrow flaggy bog, with three straight ditches, and a meandering muddy streamlet, traversing its black surface. 'Ha! what's John at there?' exclaimed Harry, pulling short up, and pointing to that worthy crawling on all fours behind a tuft of high bullrushes toward the circuitous creek — 'There are duck there for a thousand!' — and as he spoke, up rose with splash and quack and flutter, four or five long-winged wild-fowl; bang! went John's long duck-gun, and simultaneously with the report, one of the fowl keeled over, killed quite dead, two others faltering somewhat in their flight, and hanging on the air heavily for a little space; when over went a second into the creek, driving the water six feet into the air in a bright sparkling shower.

The other three, including the hit bird, which rallied as it flew, dived forward, flying very fast, obliquely to the road; and to my surprise Harry put the whip on his horses with such vigor that in an instant both were on the gallop, the wagon bouncing and rattling violently on the rude log-floored causeway. An instant's thought showed me his object, which was to weather on the fowl sufficiently to get a shot, ere they should cross the road; although I marvelled still how he intended to pull up from the furious pace at which he was going in time to get a chance. Little space, however, had I for amazement; for the ducks, which had not risen high into the air, were forced to cross some thirty yards ahead of us, by a piece of tall woodland, on the verge of which were several woodcutters, with two or three large fires burning among the brushwood. 'Now, Tom,' cried Harry, feeling his horses' mouths as he spoke, but not attempting to pull up; and instantly the old man's heavy double rose steadily but quickly to his face — bang! neatly aimed, a yard ahead of the first drake, which fell quite dead into the ditch on the right hand of the causeway — bang! right across Harry's face, who leaned back to make room for the fat fellow's shot, so perfectly did the two rare and crafty sportsmen comprehend one another — and before I heard the close report, the second wild-duck slanted down wing-tipped before the wind, into the flags on the left hand, having already crossed the road when the shot struck him. The fifth and only now remaining bird, which had been touched by Van Dyne's first discharge, alighting in the marsh not far from his crippled comrade.

'Beautiful! beautiful indeed!' cried I; 'that was the very prettiest thing — the quickest, smartest, and best calculated shooting I ever yet have seen!'

'We have done that same once or twice before though — hey, Tom?' replied Harry, pulling his horses well together and gathering them up by slow degrees — not coming to a dead stop till we had passed Tom's first bird, some six yards or better. 'Now jump out, all of you; we have no time to lose; no not a minute! for we must bag these fowl; and those two chaps we saw on Mulford's meadows, are racing now at their top speed behind that hill, to cut into the big meadow just ahead of us, you may rely on that. You, Timothy, drive on under that big pin-oak — take off the bridles — halter the horses to the tree, not to the fence — and put their sheets and hoods on, for, early as it is, the flies are troublesome already. Then mount the game-bags and be ready — by the time you're on foot we shall be with you. Forester, take the red dog to Van Dyne, that second bird of his will balk him else, and I shan't be surprised if he get up again! Pick up that mallard out of the ditch as you go by — he lies quite dead at the foot of those tall reeds. Come, Tom, load up your old cannon, and we'll take Shot, bag that wing-tipped duck, and see if we can't nab the crippled bird, too! come along!'

Off we set without further parley; within five minutes I had bagged Tom's first, a rare green-headed drake, and joined Van Dyne, who, with the head and neck of his first bird hanging out of his breeches pocket, where, in default of game-bag, he had stowed it, was just in the act of pouring a double handful of BB into his Queen Ann's musket. Before he had loaded, we heard a shot across the road, and saw the fifth bird fall to Harry at long distance, while Shot was gently mouthing Draw's second duck, to his unutterable contentment. We had some trouble in gathering the other, for it was merely body-shot, and that not mortally, so that it dived like a fish, bother-ing poor Chase beyond expression. This done, we re-united our forces and instantly proceeded to the big meadow, which we found, as Harry had anticipated, in the most perfect possible condition — the grass was short, and of a delicate and tender green, not above ankle deep, with a rich close black mould, moist and soft for boring everywhere, under foot — with, at rare intervals, a slank, as it is termed in Jersey, or hollow winding course, in which the waters have lain longer than elsewhere, covered with a deep, rust-colored scum, floating upon the stagnant pools. We had not walked ten yards before a bird jumped up to my left hand, which I cut down — and while I was in the act of loading another and another rose, but scarcely cleared the grass ere the unerring shot of my two stanch companions had stopped their flight forever. Some ten yards from the spot on which my bird had fallen, lay one of these wet slanks which I have mentioned — Chase drew on the dead bird and pointed — another fluttered up under his very nose, dodged three or four yards to and fro, and before I could draw my trigger, greatly to my surprise spread out his wings and settled. Harry and Tom had seen the move, and walked up to join me; just as they came Chase retrieved the snipe I had shot, and when I had entombed it in my pocket, we moved on all abreast. Skeap! skeap! skeap! Up they jumped, not six yards from our feet, positively in a flock, their bright white bellies glancing in the sun, twenty at least in number. Six barrels were discharged, and six birds fell; we loaded and moved on, the dogs drawing at every step, backing and pointing, so foiled was the ground with the close scent; again, before we had gathered the fruit of our first volley, a dozen birds rose altogether; again six barrels bellowed across the plain, and again Tom and Harry slew their shots right and left, while I, alas! shooting too quick, missed one! I know what I aver will hardly be believed, but it is true, notwithstanding; a third time the same thing happened, except that instead of twelve, thirty or forty birds rose at the least, six of which came again to earth, within, at farthest, thirty paces — making an aggregate of eighteen shots, fired in less, assuredly, than so many minutes, and seventeen birds fairly brought to bag. These pocketed, by twos and threes Van Dyne had marked the others down in every quarter of the meadow — and, breaking off, singly and in pairs, we worked our will with them. So hard, however, did they lie, that many could not be got up again at all. In one instance I had marked four, as I thought, to a yard, between three little stakes, placed in the angles of a plat, not above twenty paces in diameter — taking Van Dyne along with me who is so capital a marker that for a dead bird I would back him against any retriever living — I went without a dog to walk them up. But no! I quartered the ground, re-quartered it, crossed it a third time, and was just quitting it despairing, when a loud shout from John, a pace or two behind, warned me they were on wing! Two crossed me to the right, one of which dropped to John's Queen Ann almost as soon as I caught sight of them, and one to my left. At the latter I shot first, and, without waiting to note the effect of my discharge, turned quickly and fired at the other. I concluded he had fluttered on some small space, but John Van Dyne swears point blank that I shot so quick that the second bird was on the ground before the first had reached it. In this — a solitary case, however — I fear John's famed veracity will scarce obtain for him that credit, or for me that renown, to which he deemed us both entitled.

Before eleven of the clock, we had bagged forty-seven birds; we sat down in the shade of the big pin-oak, and fed deliciously, and went our way rejoicing, toward the upper meadows, fully expecting that before returning we should have doubled our bag.

But, alas! the hopes of men! — Troy meadows were too dry — Persipany too wet — Loise's had been beat already, and not one snipe did we even see or hear, nor one head of game did we bag; the morning's sport, however, had put us in such merry mood that we regarded not the evening's disappointment, and we sat down in great glee to supper. What we devoured, or what we drank, it boots not to record; but it was late at night before the horses were ordered, and we prepared for a start.

After the horses were announced as ready, somewhat to my surprise, Harry took old Tom aside, and was engaged for some time in deep conversation; and when they had got through with it, Harry shook him warmly by the hand, saying —

'Well, Tom, I am sincerely obliged to you; and it is not the first time either.'

'Well, well, boy,' responded Tom, 'I guess it 'taint the first time as you've said so, though I don't know right well what for neither. Any how, I hope 't won't be the last time as I'll fix you as you wants to be. But come, it's gittin' late, and I've got to drive Hard's horse over to Paterson to-night.'

'Oh, that will not be much,' said Harry. 'It is but nine miles, and we are twenty from New York.'

'Any how, we must take a partin' drink, and I stands treat. I showed Beers Hard how to make that egg nog, Timothy — Timothy, you darned critter, bring in that ere egg nog.'

This was soon done, and Tom, replenishing all the glasses to the brim, said very solemnly, 'this is a toast, boys, now a raal bumper.'

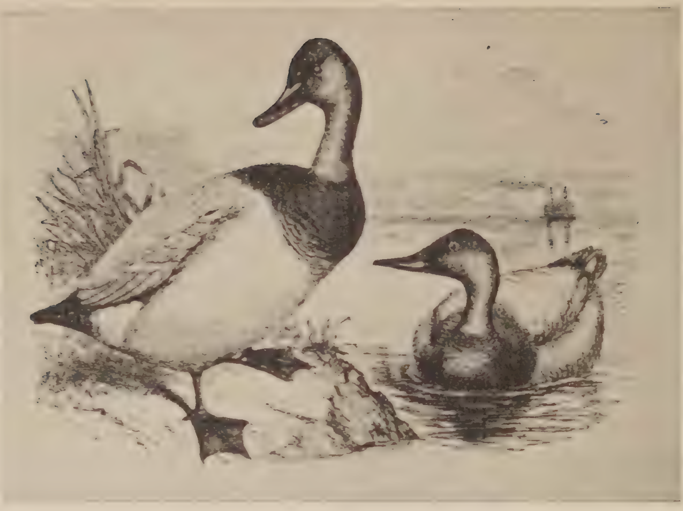
Harry grinned conscious. I stood, waiting, wondering.

'Here's luck!' said Tom, 'luck to Harry Archer, a landholder in our own old Orange!'

The Toast was quaffed in an instant; and, as I drew my breath, I said —

'Well, Harry, I congratulate you truly. So you have bought the Jem Burt Place?'

'Thanks to old Tom, dog cheap!' replied Archer; 'and I have only to say, farther, that early in the Autumn, I hope to introduce you, and all my old friends, to the interior of the new box.'



VII

CANVAS-BACK SHOOTING ON CHESAPEAKE BAY

John Krider

1853

LATE in the fall of the year 18—, while partridge shooting in the neighborhood of the Chesapeake, we received an invitation from Mr. J. W. McCullough, of Port Deposit, to accompany him on an excursion in a new scow, which he had built and equipped after the most approved manner, especially to kill ducks in the Susquehanna and the upper bay. She was wall-sided and flat-bottomed, forty feet long and nine feet beam. She carried a jib and a large fore and aft mainsail. A space barely sufficient for a tall man to lie at length, was decked off forward, and contained three or four bunks and a small stove, besides the stooling guns, several bags of heavy shot and kegs of ducking powder, not to speak of a quart coffee-pot and two large baskets of provender. This was the hardy duck-shooter's cabin; it was well pitched so as to be watertight, and was entered by a small scuttle with a slide; here he cooked, eat, slept, kept tally of his game, manufactured the heads and necks of decoys, cut his gun-wads, spun his yarns, drank his grog or coffee, and kept care outside from October until April, during the severest season of the year.

The scow's rudder was set on a pivot so as to be readily unshipped in case of necessity, or to be used like the steering-oar of a whale boat, in throwing her head around. She had large leeboards, which enabled her to lie very close to the wind in moderate weather, though from her shape and her being all above water, she was sure to make much leeway in a rough sea. Going large in fair weather she sailed and steered well, and in fact, was just the sort of craft which is especially adapted for navigating the shoal water of the upper bay.

Midships rested the battery or 'sunk-box,' of which we shall soon have occasion to speak, and piled up in great heaps abaft on either side, but so as not to interfere with the motions of the rudder, were the decoys or wooden ducks, each having its cord, with the weight attached, wound round its body, the last turn being taken round the neck, regular duck-shooter fashion. They had evidently seen service from their bleached and weather-beaten looks. Some of them bore the appearance of having been recently pretty well peppered in the way of business, and particles of grass might still be seen adhering to the anchors and cables of a few of the uppermost. The scow was furnished with raft-poles, and heavy oars or sweeps to be used in forcing her over the flats in a calm, and two large, four-oared, flat-bottomed boats, called yawls, towed astern.

At two o'clock on a cold, clear morning, we set off from McCullough's hospitable roof, and traversing the single, straggling street, reached the scow at Wilmer's wharf, where we found the helmsman and the boy waiting for us on board. The fastenings were cast off, and getting clear of the rafts, we run up the jib, and with the wind fresh from nor'-west, stood down along the shore, which is bold, and could be just seen from the scow, with here and there the white front of a dwelling, looming up above the town in the dim glimmer of the star-light. It was our intention to set the battery on Devil's Island, so called, though in reality it is nothing but a sunken shoal, lying nearly south-west from Havre de Grace, and on the western side of the *swash*, or channel through the submerged flats. These last, be it understood by the general reader, extend for eight miles or more from the mouth of the river to the island of Spesutia, and are the feeding grounds on which tens of thousands of the choicest species of ducks, are annually slaughtered by the market-shooters of Havre de Grace. Below Spesutia the water is deeper, but from the island to Havre de Grace the ship-channel is, so to speak, but a mere 'swash.' This entire ground, from the slight rise of the tide, and from the fact of its being thickly covered with grass, which is the food of the fowl, and serves also to break the force of the seas, which roll in from the lower bay, is especially suited for the operations of the floating batteries.

It was our good fortune to be accompanied on this excursion by an old friend from the city, whom we encountered at Port Deposit, and after seeing the mainsail set, and the craft fairly under way, steering for Havre de Grace light, we retired to the cabin, to while away the time by listening to the sporting experiences of the owner of the scow, or by chatting over adventures of the past. Passing Havre de Grace, we found the duck-shooters of that place already on the stir, and were successively hailed by Baird, Holly and other famous shots, who were preparing to drop down to their respective anchoring grounds.

Coming to, at last, just as the moon rose, we dropped anchor on the shoal, and waited impatiently until within a half an hour of daybreak, when, all things else being in readiness, we went to work transferring the decoys into the boats, and launching the battery over the side. This last was done by our united strength as carefully as possible, so as to avoid shipping water into the box, McCullough then stepped into the box, unfolded the floating wings and turned up the guards; several pigs of iron, sufficiently heavy to sink the frame of the battery to the water's edge, were handed in; a board, covered with a blanket, was then laid over these on the bottom of the sunken box, and after receiving the guns and ammunition, the occupant pushed off from the scow with his boat-hook, while we jumped into the yawl to tow the machine head to wind on the selected spot, and assist in setting the stools. The former was then anchored stem and stern, and by the waning light of the moon we proceeded to dispose the decoys, in the arrangement of which McCullough, like most expert duck-shooters, was very fastidious.

They were placed so as to ride freely without coming in contact with each other, principally at the stern and on either hand of the side wings, the perfection of the art appearing to be to avoid leaving a gap in any part of the rank, and yet to prevent, if possible, the ducks from falling foul. A few of the lightest were placed immediately on the wings, and several heads of decoys were firmly fixed on wooden pins on the deck of the battery. The false ducks were not all imitations of canvas-backs, but had red-heads, black-heads, and a few bald-pates, intermingled with the nobler variety. The outside duck at the tail of the rank was a veteran canvas-back, facetiously called the toller.

The rank being now complete and made to mimic life to admiration by the action of the ripples, — as each duck rode knowingly to its anchor, — and the frame in which the box was set flush with the water's edge, yet preserved from filling by the floating wings fore and aft, and at the sides, of course, the box being deep enough to receive the body of a man laid at length, must be sunk some eighteen inches below the surface, and the shooter himself, in his watery ambuscade, perfectly invisible to the passing ducks, except from the air immediately over his head. The water being moderately smooth, the guards were then turned down flat with the deck, and while the boats pulled back to the scow, which immediately lifted her anchor, the shooter loaded his three guns, and placing them in the box with their muzzles resting on its edge, took a last look at his decoys; then observing daylight breaking in the east, he laid himself flat on his back on the board, and shut out from every object and sound, save the pale, dull sky and the slight, rippling plash within an inch of his head, — all eye and ear, waited patiently for his first dart.

We had hardly anchored about a half a mile higher up, so as not to interfere with the flight of the game, which, as a rule, work to windward and of course come up to leeward of the shooter, or at his feet, before we heard the faint report of his gun, although it was not sufficiently light to see either the ducks or the decoys from the scow.

The boy continued to report shot after shot, while we were engaged in eating our breakfast in the cabin, and as we came out, Davis, the helmsman, directed our attention to a large flock of canvas-backs, some of whom he swore in his emphatic way, 'were going into the pot.' Glancing along the broad expanse of water on which the sun had now risen, we plainly saw the ducks sweeping swiftly up to the tail of the decoys, among which the foremost had hardly alighted, before you saw the dark figure of McCullough rise from the water as if by magic — then the successive discharges, and the white water occasioned by the fall of each duck, the helmsman counting five down. The next instant the shooter was standing up, waving his cap, and jumping into the yawl with Ben Davis, we pulled away with might and main to secure the dead ducks.

Fifteen canvas-backs and three red-heads were picked up, two of these, which were crippled, being shot over, as the phrase goes, with a small gun loaded with number eight. We then rowed straight for the battery, in which McCullough now insisted that we should take our turn. There was no time to argue matters with ducks on the fly; so landing on one side

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CANVAS-BACKS AND RED-HEADS

From a plate by Louis Agassiz Fuertes in
Forbush's 'Birds of Massachusetts'

of the deck, while we came off at the other, we took our place in some trepidation of spirit, years have been intervened since we had drawn trigger on wild fowl, if we except occasionally knocking over a cripped sprig-tail or mallard on the snipe grounds. The remembrance that our friend from Philadelphia was a capital duck-shot, by no means tended to allay this feeling, and it was not until the sound of oars had died away on our ears, and we felt ourselves, as it were, alone with the decoys, which kept bobbing their heads as if they were actually swallowing duck-weed with the greatest possible gusto, and shifting their bearings with inimitable gravity, that we regained our wonted nerve, and made up our mind to mischief. The next moment our ears were saluted by the whistling of fowls' wings, and the patter of their feet in the act of alighting on the left of the battery; seizing the small gun we sat up in the box and knocked over one canvas-back swimming among the stools, and a second as it rose, and catching up the second gun fired ineffectually at two others making off; then charging the pieces, cast a glance at the dead birds to ascertain the direction of their drift, and sank back out of sight, without as much as looking at the scow, feeling very certain that had the presence of mind, in which we felt so assured before, governed our actions, all four ducks would have been at that moment floating dead on the tide. In fact, gentle reader, in the unexcusable heat of the moment, a great blunder had been committed in shooting at the ducks in the water, when we should have first drawn trigger on those yet upon the wing, but in the act of dropping their sterns, to alight outside of the first; when we should have used the second gun on the others, which would have still been in available distance. Had Fred been there, we thought, he would have had four ducks down; but, *n'importe*, let them come again.

But at least ten minutes of expectation elapsed before another shot was obtained, during which time, to recover our coolness, we watched the motion of a red-head decoy, close to the after wing. A comical-looking, hard-a-weather old fellow he was, with the nail of his bill shot off and his head turned over his back, and there he kept veering and bowing, now looking us right in the eye over the edge of the wings, as he topped a small surge, and now disappearing from our sight again, — when, all at once, a small flock of black-heads appeared, setting their wings to alight, as it seemed right over him, and rising more coolly this time, we managed to kill three out of seven and cripple down a fourth, without finding occasion to use the second gun, the survivors going off so swiftly to our right, that they were far to leeward by the time we had turned. After this we had pretty shooting for about an hour, when Davis came out to relieve us, Fred preferring to take his turn in the afternoon, as the swell was sinking fast with the wind, and in a half an hour it bade fair to be calm. Accordingly Davis had not fired more than a half a dozen shots, killing a canvas-back at each discharge, before the water was as smooth as a millpond; our own decoys and those of one or two other batteries at a still greater distance, loomed up on the glassy flood as large as geese; the ducks ceased to stool, and we passed the time until noon chatting, and examining the game, which lay ranged in pairs on the thwartboards, or starting up as the report of Davis' gun told of an occasional shot at a single duck, passing over his stools, on its way up or down the bay.

While we were at dinner a circumstance happened at the battery, which almost caused Davis to avow himself a believer in the doctrine of predestination, at least as regards wild fowl shooting. Not having had a shot for some time, he was lying at his ease with his cap drawn over his eyes to defend them from the vertical rays of the sun, when a swan passed slowly over his decoys, and strange to say, every gun in the battery missed fire, and the noble bird continued its course down the bay unharmed.

'I had drawn for his neck,' said the unfortunate duck-shooter, 'and was as sure of him as I was of my supper; but the Walker caps are not worth the copper they are made of any more, and I suppose the d——d bird would have gone free, if I had fired the biggest swivel-gun on the Potomac at his head, at the same distance.'

'No doubt of it,' said we; 'there is no fighting against fate — but to change the subject, were you ever caught in a heavy blow in one of these tubs, Ben?'

'Was I?' he echoed, looking sideways at us, while he kept his swarthy face turned like a wall towards the box, in which Fred was now lying; 'you see, sir, we left Annapolis that morning bound for the Potomac for a change of ground; the wind was west when we started, but soon hauled to N.N.E. and then back to north, blowing a regular persimmon gale. I was at the helm — Tom painting decoys, — when the sail jibed and she came head to in spite of us — shipped three seas in less than three minutes — a hogshead of water at each sea — lost all the decoys overboard — started the sunk-box — tore mainsail from the gaff, and had to run into Cove Point harbor, eight miles from Patuxet river, where we lay snug enough until it had spit its spite.'

'A good harbor that?' we asked by way of passing time.

'Ay,' said he, 'the best on the Chesapeake — a perfect basin — but d——n that swan and the hen that hatched him! I don't care for the value of the bird, sir, — I've seen acres on acres of 'em at a time, mixed with geese, — but by the North Pole, it was enough to make a man forswear father and mother and turn Turk to lose the shot.'

'But where did you see swans by the acre?' said we.

'Where?' he repeated, 'why in a dozen places, to be sure; but the most I ever did see, was on a sandbar, with rocks at its head, that makes up and covers the mouth of the Yeocomoco river. There's two bars, by the way, both making from the mainland, one up from the mouth of the river, and the other down; there's not a foot of water on either bar; you must stand up between the two, or you'll stick. Both bars were covered with geese and swans, and when they got up a half a mile off, they made a noise like all old Nick's hounds in full cry; — but there goes a small dart of red-heads — no, they've turned — yes — there they go — there they go, straight for the decoys — four ducks down!'

'Ay,' said McCullough, 'Mr. W. shoots ducks well; I've been out with him before; he's quite as sure in the box as you or I, Ben.'

'Ay,' answered Ben, 'it may be, in moderate weather and when the ducks come well up: but what would he do in the box in a heavy swell, with the wind as keen as a knife, on a December day?'

'Oh!' said McCullough, 'that is a horse of another color. The clouds are moving in the nor'-west; we shall have the breeze in the old quarter.'

'Here it comes,' said Ben, 'we shall kill ducks fast before sun-down.'

'Whose scow is that anchored in shore in a line with yon bluff, Ben?'

'Baird's, I reckon,' answered Ben, 'and he has had shooting; the ducks have been flying that way all the morning.'

The wind soon freshened, and the bay was all animation again, the ducks flying in large flocks, the batteries cannonading, boats plying to and fro, and Fred shooting in a style not to be surpassed. The puffs of smoke rising from the water's edge, reminded us strongly of the hurried glimpse which a sailor sometimes gets of a white jet or spout, when he turns his head for a moment, while pulling to windward in chase of a gallied sperm whale; and the sight of a dark figure suddenly seen standing apparently on the water a half a mile off, and then as suddenly sinking again, bore some resemblance to a much rarer sight, a whale's head thrust vertically out of the sea, seen from the masthead at the horizon's verge on a clear day.

In the course of the afternoon Davis and ourselves had a sharp chase after a crippled duck; from the trouble it gave us we both supposed it to be a canvas-back, but after being killed at last by a snap shot, it proved to be a black-head.

Fred continued in the box during the whole afternoon, and as far as our remembrance serves us, did not miss a single duck. At sun-down we pushed off from the scow to 'take up.' While securing the decoys, a canvas-back darted twice between the boats and the battery, and returning a third time was killed by our city friend who was still in the box. We have often observed this sort of infatuation in the most wary and shy of the feathered race; time after time in the falcon tribe, and even in the common crow. We have shot hawks in close pursuit of woodpeckers and other small birds in an open field, and in one instance, after witnessing from the barn-yard a very interesting chase between the *Falco Columbarius* and a tame pigeon, killed the former but a few feet behind the latter, which, but for the timely rescue, must inevitably have become its prey.

Taking out the dogs during the past winter, they pointed a single crow, which being busily engaged in digging some object from the ground, allowed us to come within ten yards of it, although we had a gun in our hands at the time, which circumstance, gentle reader, while it rather invalidates the popular notion that the crow is able to scent powder, shows that the eye of the bird was fully engaged with the object on the ground, and did not in reality see us or the dogs, until its attention was attracted by the sound of our approach. The study of the vision of birds is one of the most beautiful and interesting departments of natural history; with the exception of that of flying, perhaps, the most so of all to the scientific inquirer. When we reflect that they do not see objects as we do, but with a magnifying power, which, according to the adjustment of the focus of the eye, has been compared to that of the telescope or the microscope, there is no doubt that in each case we have related, the eye of the bird was, so to speak, so filled up with the object on which its vision, for the time, was earnestly bent, that it saw adjoining objects but very imperfectly, just as the falcon has been known to fly in full career against a tree in pursuit of a partridge, and the duck, after twice avoiding the men in the boats near the battery, met its death, at last, over the decoys which it was so desirous to join.

Taking up some two hundred decoys on a cold, blustering evening, is rather tedious and benumbing work to a novice. While one person manages the oars, the others pick up each duck singly, so as not to entangle it with its fellows, and, after winding the cord around its body and removing the weed from the weight, stow it away in the bow or stern of the yawl. In the meantime the man in the box, laying aside his guns, secures the few ducks near the wings, turns up the guards, and as soon as the stools are all in the boat, weighs the anchors of the battery, and is towed down to the scow. The contents of the boats and the box are then passed on board, and lastly the battery itself; after which sail is made for home.

On reaching Havre de Grace, we went into Baird's hotel, where the duck-shooters of the place are in the habit of congregating to talk over the exploits of the day.

These men are both fishers and fowlers, being engaged during the spring and part of the summer, in the extensive fisheries of the Potomac and Susquehanna, and returning to their more congenial occupation in autumn. They are generally well informed on all matters connected with their business, — sometimes even acute, and some of them realize handsome profits in their hardy and exciting pursuits. They are almost universally expert shots; indeed, it is as common for a man reared on either shore to shoot well, as it is for a dog in the same sections to swim and dive like an otter. Many of the poorer inhabitants train their large dogs not only to retrieve ducks shot from the shore, but also to assist in bringing in quantities of driftwood, which come down the stream with 'a fresh.' Some are said to supply themselves with winter fuel in this way. We remember to have watched with interest, from the Port Deposit side, the efforts of a large cur dog to tow in a fragment of lumber, after which an old negro had sent him out into the stream. The log was heavy, some distance out, and the river on the rise; for some moments the old fellow was in a state of great excitement between hope and fear; but at last the faithful animal succeeded in getting the wood into the eddy off shore, when Pompey, showing the remains of his teeth in a tremendous grin, jumped into a shattered and leaky boat, and sculled off to his aid.

The next morning we anchored the battery on the eastern shore, between Havre de Grace and Port, off Stump's Mill. The wind was easterly; the weather cold and stormy; and a great many ducks on the fly down the river. Our ears were constantly saluted with the *whew! whew!* of the widgeon — the harsh cry of the south-southerly — the whistling wings of the golden eye — the quack of the butter-ball; and we were kept constantly on the alert, knocking over the canvas-backs and red-heads, until near noon, when the wind increased to a half gale, the battery went adrift, the scow dragged her anchor almost at the same moment, while the boat was off, and for a while, we were, as sailors say, caught in a heap. Giving up the search for the dead ducks, we pulled might and main for the battery, while Fred and the boy lifted the scow's anchor, and hoisting the jib, ran closer in shore. On approaching the box, we found McCullough standing knee-deep in water, having thrown overboard all his iron, after driving down through the decoys. The battery had then brought up, but the waves were making a clean breach over the box, and the stools were in a confused state of entanglement and disarray. Some had been detached from their weights and were floating off, or going on the lee shore *to caulk*, as Davis expressed it, tumbling about on the waves as if in joy of their escape; others were foul of the anchors under the frame of the battery, and the rest in a cumber; while the wind blew stiffly, in gusts, from the heights of the opposite shore — the river grew every moment more rough, and the tall frame of McCullough, standing apparently on the water, and actively plying boathook, as he grappled for the anchors, reminded one strangely enough, in the midst of the scene, of the picture of Washington crossing a river on a raft, on his mission to Fort Le Beuf in the old colonial days. Working hard, it was some time before we secured the decoys and shipped the battery, when after taking a bumper of good old Bourbon all round, we stood over towards Port, beating, scow-fashion, broadside as often as bow on. We afterwards heard that Baird and several other shooters below, had drifted completely across the *swash* in their batteries that morning. No serious accident happened, and so far as we are informed, no case of drowning ever occurred in the batteries on the Chesapeake. The case to which Dr. Lewis refers in his article on duck shooting, was occasioned by the sinking of an old yawl, loaded down to the water's edge with stones, as a substitute for a battery. She was struck by a sudden flaw of wind, and, of course, sunk, drowning her occupant, who either from inability to swim, or from some unexplained cause, went down with her in eight or nine feet of water.

Formerly ducks were very abundant on the western shore between Port Deposit and Havre de Grace, and great numbers are still killed from blinds and batteries, from the bridge, down to Stump's Point at the mouth of Furnace creek. The digging of the tide-water canal, however, drove the ducks off the flats and marshes of the western shore. Below Havre de Grace, on the western side of the *swash*, near Donahue's battery, is good canvas-back and red-head ground. About half a mile from the battery, to the eastward, Mr. Charles Boyd of Havre de Grace, killed one hundred and sixty-three canvas-backs, on the tenth day of November last, and we have been assured that in the spring of eighteen hundred and fifty, the same famous duck-shooter killed two hundred and seventy-one canvas-backs, and red-heads off the mouth of North-East river, three or four miles from the battery. On the same day on which Boyd killed his canvas-backs, near Donahue's battery, Mr. John Holly, another expert duck-shot, belonging to the same place, killed one hundred and nineteen of the same species on Devil's Island; and it is said that several thousand ducks were brought into the town that day, by the different parties engaged in shooting on the flats.

VIII

DUCK SHOOTING IN BARNEGAT BAY

T. Robinson Warren

1871

Give me duck shooting, I say, above all other. It's all very fine to shoot at a deer, but it is not so fine to be backed up against a pine tree for half a dozen hours waiting for him to come, and when he does ten to one you won't be ready for him and will miss him. No! no! I say there is no sport that is accessible to us denizens of cities so exciting as duck and goose shooting. The charm consists, perhaps, not so much in bringing down the game as in the surroundings; the total and absolute change from the conventionalism of city life, involving as it does, as a general thing, what is usually considered great hardship and exposure, but which in reality is the charm of the expedition. To a man who has been caged for months in an office, reduced to a mere machine, run for the purpose of turning out so many dollars per diem, whose only exercise has been an occasional walk of a mile or so, between his luxurious residence and his place of business, the change to a fisherman's hovel on an open beach, with a snow storm driving through its every crack and cranny, could hardly be more radical; accustomed to extreme city hours, the pillow at eight P.M., and the reveillé at three A.M., must be startling. A four miles' sail in a sneak 'box' to his shooting point, before dawn, and a day passed in recumbent position, on a wet meadow, all this, it must be confessed, must seem novel, yet there *is* an indescribable something about it which yearly attracts men of refinement and means, who at home enjoy every luxury which money can bestow; to me it is irresistible. The sail across the bay, of an autumnal night, under a close-reefed sail, with a nor'easter howling about us; the arrival and honest shake of the rough hand; the thundering breakers bursting on the beach; the welcome supper; the pipe in the smoky bar, the nightcap of mountain dew, the old-fashioned feather bed, with the gale driving the snow in upon you, and the roar of the surf as a lullaby; the flaring candle in your eyes, summoning you to get up; the steaming breakfast, partaken by a dozen men in full hunting costume; the exit into the frosty air of a November night, for night it is yet and will be for two hours; the sail across the bay to your point, in the silent watches of the night. Reaching the point, the reconstruction of the nest or blind, the adjustment of waterproof, then the eager waiting for day and game, the 'honk' of the gunner, as a bunch of black duck come winding round the point, scarce discernible in the gloaming; the admonitory 'get ready,' the half-cock of the gun, the bang! bang! bang! the splash of the game in the water, all! all! carries with it a fascination too irresistible to be analysed on rationalistic grounds. I will tell you what it is. It is manhood asserting its dignity! Shut up in offices, or dens rather, of law or of commerce, climbing a daily treadmill, slaves to our customers or our clients, we inwardly feel a contempt for ourselves, and oftentimes an abhorrence for our calling and those whose patronage gives us our bread and butter; to such this life is a safety valve....

Last week, having a little spare time on our hands, we resolved to go down to Barnegat Bay and have a shot at the ducks, and we accordingly duly announced our intention in family council, whereupon our better half immediately had a vision of a week's rollicking, unbecoming a pater-familias, to be followed by a sharp attack of inflammatory rheumatism. The youngsters, however, received the announcement with demonstrations of evident delight, as being suggestive of long stories for approaching winter's entertainments, and forthwith began to 'quack' and 'honk,' in the most deafening manner, and frantic rushes were made for our boots, over-alls and shooting equipments generally. No. 4, whom we call the General, in his military capacity, seized our gun; No. 3, who, judging from her pugnacious disposition, will be a second Joan d'Arc, joining issue for its possession, while No. 2, rejoicing in the name of Schuyler, and true to his historic antecedents, was bestowing his attention upon the ammunition, and No. 1 (our John) quietly assumed the post of Inspector-General and issued his orders with great dignity. Our preparations made, we proceeded to the steamboat, but found to our consternation, shared by some twenty sportsmen, that she was incapacitated and could not leave. An hour of awful suspense elapsed, setters and pointers gave forth low growls of dissatisfaction, and gunners, after staring each other in the face and out of countenance, gradually, under the influence of case bottles, grew friendly and breathed vows of vengeance against steamers generally. A substitute was, however, finally furnished, when, shifting our traps, we were soon steaming down the bay, and a picturesque group we formed, in our gunning costumes, with half-a-dozen thoughtful dogs artistically interspersed among us. Away we whisked down the bay, passing Owl's Head, Lafayette, through the Swash Channel to Port Monmouth, and thence by rail and stage to Tom's River, where, having had a capital feed, we got aboard the little *Zouave*, and stretched across the bay to Bill Chadwick's. 'Quango,' the great Newfoundland, saluting us as we touched the beach, accompanied us to the house, where we found a 'goodlie' company of gunners assembled.

The little low bar-room looked cosily familiar to us, as we peered through a cloud of tobacco-smoke, as did the faces of the various gunners there assembled, — Jno. Harbor, Zeph., Charley Stout, Dave, Lishe, Jno. Gaunt, and the rest of them, as they warmly welcomed us. The style of accommodation is peculiar to the beach, and gunners are generally expected to sleep double. We, ourselves, were too tired to be particular, so we turned in with our boatman, and had hardly, as we thought, got to sleep, when a candle flashed before our eyes, and a rough shake of the shoulder, brought us to the consciousness that it was three o'clock A.M., and time to get up. Without waiting to yawn, we sprang up, and in a quarter of an hour were arrayed in full shooting costume and were sitting down to a substantial breakfast. It was still pitch dark when we slipped into our sneak boat, nor indeed had the day fairly broken until we were comfortably sitting in our blind, with our gun at half-cock, waiting for a flock of ducks. By way of digression, let us here state what is, in our opinion, an essential to the comfort of the duck shooter. What we call blinds in the northern part of the bay, are simply points of meadow, jutting out into the bay, always damp and frequently very wet; on the extreme end of these points, a circular rampart of reeds and sea grass, about thirty inches high is thrown up, within which the gunners (two generally,) recline, watching their decoys, which float at anchor within thirty yards of the point. Now as the gunner is always exposed to the bleak winds sweeping over the meadows, and is obliged twenty times a day to lie flat on his back in the wet sedge, it becomes necessary to provide the proper clothing to guard against a thorough wetting, with its attendants of cold and rheumatics. We therefore make the following suggestions, viz.: heavy woolen stockings and the thickest possible woolen drawers and under-shirts, as well as a worsted muffler for the throat, with a pair of long loose rubber boots, and over these again an oil-skin suit (the color of the sedge), which can be bought at any slop shop along West Street, hat and all, for $10. We should also advise an India-rubber army blanket, or a buffalo robe, and an army satchel for ammunition.

When we broke off into the foregoing digression, we were reclining on our batteries awaiting a shot. Unfortunately for us, however, the wind had been strong from northwest for six weeks past and was then blowing therefrom, the very worst possible direction, and the weather had been so mild that the ducks had hardly begun to migrate and the only ones that one could hope to get a bang at were the regular traders, who rarely came to stool, being too knowing by half. Just as day was breaking, however, half a dozen dippers came down and took a look at our stool, but seeing the point, wheeled and shot away, but took with them a couple of charges, killing two and crippling a third. Barely were we loaded again, when 'quack, quack,' goes the gunner, and three black ducks come sweeping along, spy the stool, give an answering 'quack,' but sail out of gunshot. Hardly are they gone by, when down we go again — p-r-r-r, p-r-r-r, and up come a bunch of broad-bill, and as they flutter over the stool we give them three barrels and turn them over on their backs; while loading, a flock of mallard poise over us for an instant, answer our 'quack,' but catching sight of us, are off again; hardly are we capped before, just over the edge of the horizon, we see a long string of geese heading for us this time, and we lie as flat as pancakes — (a small pool of water trickling down the back of our necks)... 'Honk, honk' from the stand — 'Honk,

IN DROPPING FLIGHT
From a drypoint by Frank W. Benson

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

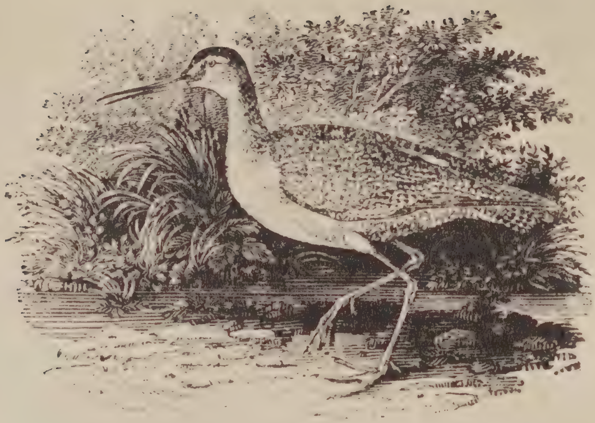
honk,' goes goosey, and down comes the flock within a couple of hundred yards of the stool, then follows a long conversation between the inmates of the stand and the different members of the flock — first, the conventional 'honk,' which being politely answered is equivalent to 'How do you do?' 'Very well, thank you!' Then comes a low quack, quack, quack (not unlike the enunciation of a London cabby, on a wet night, when, in shortest and most guttural tones, he compresses into the smallest possible dimensions the word cab), this last quack, signifies walk in if you please, after which, as goosey more nearly approaches, a dialogue in an unknown dialect ensues between fowl and gunner, which generally ends in the slaughter of the victim.... Hallo! here come the ducks again, three big black ducks — quack! quack! — bang! bang! — down go two and away swims off the third. badly hit though.

'John! how wild the birds are, don't you think they get wilder every year?' 'Well, yes, in the earlier part of the season, but when the flight begins in earnest, the new comers come to stool as well as ever.' 'There are a good many gunning houses along the bay, — eh, John?' 'Yes, coming down the beach from the point there's Jakey's, Bill Chadwick's, Ortley's, Amos Grant's, and Martin's at the inlet, Double Jim's and Kenzie's below that, beside a score on the main, and they all have their advantages too. In the early fall, the shooting at the head of the bay is best, but toward December, when the geese and brant come, we think that Double Jim's and Kenzie's kill most; but Bill Chadwick's is a sort of intermediate place, embodying greater advantages than any.'... Although we have before described Chadwick's, we will again venture a few passing words upon it.

Imagine a sand-spit betwixt bay and ocean, say eighteen hundred yards across, of glittering white sand thrown up into hummocks of all conceivable shapes by the autumnal gales, and midway between the raging surf and the waters of the bay a large, low beach-house, the roof sloping down to within six feet of the ground, sheltering a low corridor surrounding it, the only other building in sight of the life-boat station. Everything is suggestive of desolation as we approach, all the gunners being absent on the various points. Not a soul is to be seen, the only visible object beside the house being the débris of wrecks, here a rudder with its spokeless wheel and torn steering gear, there a spectral looking spar, encircled by the top, looking like the cross which, in Spanish countries, is raised over a murdered man.

As we step ashore, 'Quango,' a Newfoundland bitch, who swam ashore from a wreck, comes down to meet us, expressing the most canine affection at our return, and as we walked into the yard everything reminds us even more forcibly of ruin and desolation; and as our eye wanders over the 'headboards' washed ashore from wrecked ships nailed along the corridor, we unconsciously read aloud the names: 'Samuel Willetts,' 'Pilgrim,' 'T. Hathorn,' 'Darax,' 'Honduras' — and a husky, croaking, shaky voice at our side says: 'Aye! young man, you may well speak low, you would *whisper* those names if you had see'd what I have see'd. I see'd 'em all come ashore and helped save all them as was saved, and to bury them as was dead.' Heigho! there were some fine lads amongst those fourteen men — as they lay stiff and stark on the cold wet sand, and the 'poor dear' as she stood upon the broken deck, her hair streaming in the wind, with her arms around her husband's neck; and afterwards as they lay together in the clear moonlight with faces as white as the sand about them, and their arms, though stiff and stark, still encircling each other. Eh! boys! you may well look sad — you may see 'em yet in any wild night as the moon breaks through the cloud drifts, if you walk along the beach. But, though desolate outside, there's no cosier place within than Bill Chadwick's, and we defy any one to be gloomy as he sits about the barroom fire after the day's sport is over, exchanging experiences, cleaning guns, replenishing ammunition and listening to a *Mosaic* conversation never outdone since the building of Babel.... Every gunner has his say; every phase of duck shooting is discussed; guns are inspected and compared, and loud above the rest a young man is eloquent upon the beauties of Hakodadi women, appealing in support of his assertions, to another who had spent years in the China seas smuggling opium.

This polyglot is going on in an atmosphere of tobacco-smoke dense as a London fog, indeed in that low murky room scarce six feet high from floor to ceiling, barely lighted by a kerosene lamp, whose flickering flames struggled with the tobacco fumes for mastery, there was a grouping picturesque in costume, noble in form, with surroundings of fowling gear and game that would have delighted Vandyke or Murillo.



IX

SNIPE SHOOTING IN BARNEGAT BAY

T. Robinson Warren

·1871

On a wretchedly hot day a fortnight since, returning home from business, I found my wife fagged and wearied, with a ruefully woe-begone countenance, and on asking the whys and wherefores I was informed that 'Baby was drooping, had the summer complaint, and must be taken to the sea-shore.' The various localities were duly discussed: Long Branch too fashionable and too expensive; Newport and Cape May too ditto and too far; farm cottages by the sea stupid and uncomfortable; finally, in despair, I suggested Barnegat Bay! Daniel Webster, after his most magnificent effort, was never greeted with such applause as was elicited by that single word, Barnegat! Wife, boys and girls fairly shouted with delight, and the house shook with echoes of 'Hurrah for Barnegat!' Now, be it known that for years it has been my habit to make semi-annual pilgrimages to Squam Beach in search of game, and I have always come back with a goodly bag of ducks and geese, and on each occasion a solemn promise has been exacted to take the whole kit and crew down with me some time or other — and now that time had come and there was 'no going back' on them.

One day's notice was sufficient, and in twenty-four hours we were all ensconced on board the *Jessie Hoyt*, steaming down the bay to make connection with the Delaware and Raritan Bay Railroad, ticketed through to Point Pleasant. Arriving at Farmingdale, we took stage to Charley Maxon's at Point Pleasant, at the head of Barnegat Bay, and from thence, after an hour's drive along the beach, with the ocean on the one hand and bay on the other, we pulled up at Billy Chadwick's gunning-house, in just eight hours from New York. Now, for the benefit of the uninitiated, I must mention that Squam Beach is a narrow sand-pit, separated from the mainland by Barnegat Bay, having an average width of five or six hundred yards, and extending from Point Pleasant on the north down as far as the Delaware breakwater; and along its length are scattered, at intervals, houses owned by wreckers, and answering as houses of entertainment for gunners. The bay swarms with ducks and geese during fall and spring, and with snipe in summer; besides offering as fine fishing as is to be found in the world for bluefish, bass and sheepshead. Thus there is scarcely a month in the year in which the votary of gun or rod may not find enjoyment. Now Billy Chadwick's, situated seven miles from the head of the bay, is the best conducted of these houses, and may be reached from Point Pleasant by land or by one hour's sail *via* Tom's River; and having been the resort for thirty years of gentlemen sportsmen of the old school, who, while willing to rough it, *would* have things nice and clean — consequently, while the house is entirely unpretentious, it is far superior in point of comfort to the huge caravansaries at Long Branch or Cape May. Cleanliness is Madame Chadwick's first law, seconded by good coffee, good sugar, good tea, rich cream, and exquisitely cooked game, whether of fish or feather; no fuss, no obsequiousness, and egregiously small bills —*footed* up in Billy's *head.* (He keeps no accounts, save five and tally.) To this place, on a lovely summer afternoon, I drove up with wife, five children and nurse; and if the gates of heaven had opened to them there could not have been five happier faces; and even poor baby drew long breaths, as if unconsciously consuming as much as possible of the pure atmospheric food. I must own that I had felt some doubts as to my reception with such a caravan, for Billy's wife had often said she didn't mind how many gunners came, but she didn't want women around. But my doubts were quickly dispelled in the warm welcome accorded, and to my astonishment found that Billy had made an addition of a three-story verandah to his house, and that our rooms (four adjoining, with a south-easterly exposure commanding both sea and bay) were as comfortable as could be wished; and as the children tumbled into bed they dropped off to sleep, counting on their fingers the intervals between the flashes of the Barnegat light, as it burst forth and disappeared, almost eclipsed by the magnificent moon, silvering impartially bay and ocean.

Although I well knew that there was no better snipe shooting to be found than on Billy's flat, I had no idea that so early in the season there would be any flight; hence had simply brought my gun as a matter of habit. Fancy my delight, then, when I found the snipe had already appeared, and that the prospects for sport were never brighter. Leaving the youngsters dreaming of prospective fun in their moonlit chambers, with a gentle southeaster playing through their curls, I went down to ask Billy more particularly about the snipe and the morrow's shooting. Now, Billy's big house had made him proud, so he utterly refused to talk snipe till I had 'jined him in a glass of bourbon bought of Uncle Gilly Davis fourteen years ago.' Having taken the medicine kindly, Billy proceeded in this wise, in a roaring monotone:

'Now, Captain, if Providence had laid a telegraph down from the moon [Billy being a wrecker, and consequently a moon-worshiper, always locates his elysium there] to your house, and sent you a special dispatch, you couldn't hit it better. Them yelpers keep a whistlin' and shaking their yeller legs from daylight to dark. Marlin were never more plenty; jack-curlews ain't so plenty; but there is a flight of sickle-bills, and the doe-witches and robin-snipe are as thick as flies around a sugar-bowl.'

'By the way, Bill, — excuse my interrupting you — tell me how many blinds you have, and where they are.'

'Well, let me see, there's the inner and outer blind on the flat in front of the house; then there's a couple down in Nigger-house Cove, and two up in front of Uncle Sammy Chadwick's — and we can rig a dozen more if they are wanted. Now, if the wind holds where it is, I'd take the inner stand to-morrow; but if it breezes up and blows from southwest, the outer one will kill more big birds; if it hauls more to eastward, Nigger-house will be good; but if it should bear off northward, then Uncle Sammy's will be good as any, for there won't be much shootin' done anywhere.'

'Good night, Billy'; and in ten minutes, after having uncased my gun, filled pouch and flask, and taken out a pair of hole-y shoes and old pants and flannel shirt, I was sound asleep. It seemed as if I had hardly got asleep when I heard a tap at the door: 'Ten minutes to four, Sir!' 'All right!' On go the old clothes, hole-y shoes and straw hat, and my toilet is complete; when, hastily snatching up gun and accoutrements, I sally forth, and step out into the early dawn struggling with the full moon. The air was cool and bracing, the sharp cracking of the surf on the one hand contrasting with the scarcely ruffled water of the bay, barely one hundred yards apart. A fast step across a wet meadow, a moment's wade across the shoal, and I found myself in the inner blind, formed of brush breast high, with an old cane sofa — the spoil of some wrecked vessel — for a seat, and a shelf in front for the ammunition. Hastily picking up a dozen decoys and placing them within twenty yards of the stand, I took my seat, fresh capped my gun, and, like St. Paul when he was cast away, waited for day and for — game. And it was not long coming, either; for a black duck whizzed past at about fifty yards, receiving a salute from my two barrels, but the number eight shot never fazed him. Not so a bunch of doe-witches, which came skirling over the meadows, readily answering my call and circling around twice, finally doubled over the stool, only to depart as mourners, leaving half a dozen of their number dead among the deceitful decoys. Next came an old jack-curlew, who evidently knew the ropes; for, coolly gazing at the stools, then making three successive whirls and drawing the contents of two barrels, he finally sailed off. A flock of marlin came manfully to stool, but, without stopping to bury their dead, darted away to seek consolation among the decoys of the outer stand, where the balance of them terminated their career. Many a yellow-leg and creaker shared their sad fate, and by seven o'clock, in spite of many a villainous miss (of course attributable to our gun), we had a bag of twenty birds; so, leaving guns in the stand, we cheerfully responded to the breakfast bell. Assembled on the piazza, I found my mosquito fleet, who, accompanied by mamma, had been watching for some time our sport, but who were now clamorous for breakfast — and such a feed! Madame Chadwick, under the tuition of many an epicurean sportsman, not least among whom was Uncle Gilly Davis, can make a good cup of coffee, poach an egg, broil a sheepshead, or roast a snipe in a way that would do credit to Guy or Downing.

After breakfast, my little ones sue out a *habeas corpus* and obtain possession of my person, mamma being frantic with their appeals as to fishing, swimming, crabbing and sailing; and even baby, who improved by the hour, begs to be taken

BEACH SNIPE SHOOTING
From a lithograph by Currier & Ives, 1869

down to the 'big waatah.' Hastily providing the bigger ones with hook and line and showing them where they could catch sunfish and perch as fast as they could bait, and escorting mamma, baby and nurse to the beach, adjusting shawls and parasols, and marking out a line of sand fortifications to be at once commenced, I left them, to wade off again to the blind, and barely was seated when I heard the peculiar call of the sickle-bill. Now, the sickle-bill is as large as a teal-duck, and, as they stool well, offer good sport. Our answering call attracted their attention, for they hesitate in their flight, diverge, and then swoop directly for the stool; again rise, circle twice, and then double in front. Springing to our feet, we give them four barrels; two — four — six are struggling among the stool, and the rest, panic stricken and with startled cry, hover with impunity over our discharged guns. Oh, for a breech-loader!

Then come bunches of doe-witches, and single birds, yellow-legs, and the rest. Though we do some bad shooting, still by one o'clock we are well satisfied. The dinner-bell now rings, and papa's whistle calls together his little flock, who, with bared feet and sun-burnt faces, are chock-full of fishing exploits.

After dinner, lighting a cigar, we stroll over to the government station-house, accompanied by Billy, who has charge and keeps everything in apple-pie order. He explains to the wife and little ones the uses of the various inplements for life-saving — the mortar, the rockets, the life-car, the great surf-boat, etc., illustrated by sundry incidents of his experience, of deadly despair succeeded by joy at being saved, of tragic deaths, of wives and husbands washed ashore stark and stiff, clinging in each others' arms even in death; then, after a swim, we go back to our stand till the sun sets; and then, thoroughly pleased with our day's sport, we lift our decoys, and go again to the house in response to the tea-bell. Now the fishing boats come dropping in, with various experiences of sheepsheading and blue-fishing and double-reefed breezes, and new comers arrive from the main with late New York papers all eager for the morrow's sport. It was a week of days like the one described, the birds coming in thicker and thicker, varied by fishing and delightful cruises in the bay, generally with Captain Gulick in his well appointed, staunch and stiff little yacht *Zouave*, or with Johnny Chadwick, or with Charley Stout, all of whom know, as if by intuition, the whereabouts and habits of fish and fowl.

X

TWENTY YEARS' SNIPE SHOOTING

J. J. Pringle

1899

[MR. PRINGLE shot at his 'snipery' at the Bayou Teche, near Franklin, Louisiana. In the twenty seasons, 1867–68 to 1886–87 he shot 69,087 snipe to his own gun, besides various other game. His record year was '74–'75, when in 42 days' shooting he got 6615 snipe. After 1887 he shot 9515 more snipe. His biggest day was December 11, 1877, with 366 snipe. He was a native of Charleston, South Carolina, and died in 1901.]

I HAVE shot a good deal in various parts of the world, but for 'wild shooting' the shooting for the greater part of these twenty years surpasses any 'wild shooting' I have ever had.

It was, too, a very sporting kind of shooting, the snipe being such great migrants, breeding two or three thousand miles away. The climate in winter was excellent, and the grounds over which I shot, though very extensive, and therefore sometimes involving long drives, were within reach of home, and I always bathed in my own bath, dined at my own table, and slept under my own roof; comforts which are seldom the accompaniments of such very 'wild shooting.'

The situation of my shooting quarters combined the advantages of remoteness and accessibility.

As a rule, when the birds were abundant, I kept the dog, (setter or pointer) at heel, and only used him to 'find dead,' *not* to retrieve, for a dog sent out to retrieve would have put up many birds which would have gone off, some of them unshot at; and with such migrants as snipe, it used to annoy me as much to let a bird, rising within gunshot, go off unshot at, as to miss one.

By walking to the dead birds and picking them up myself I got many more shots. This gave me more walking, but more shooting.

I had a Negro (one of my old slaves), Henry, who was a wonderful marker, and it was his business in a hot corner, when the birds were rising fast and the shooting was rapid, to mark down the keep count of the dead birds, and report to me the number down.

Then, he keeping his place, I would walk to the dead birds, he telling me as nearly as possible the whereabouts of each.

At times, when the birds were numerous, I would sometimes have ten or twelve down at the same time, and by pursuing this plan, in going from one to another, by the time I had gathered all, I would perhaps kill several more; the majority of which would have escaped unshot at had I sent a dog or man out for them.

Henry was very expert and exact in his marking, and it was astonishing with what precision he could mark down and remember the locality of several dead birds at the same time. My field-staff consisted of a man to drive the wagon when I was shooting (when not shooting, I always drove myself), my man, Henry, to carry spare cartridges and the birds, and at times (especially when I expected to find many birds) I took another man or boy, sometimes two more, to act as beaters, carry cartridges, game, etc.

On reaching the ground and getting out of the wagon, I would station it on a ridge, with orders to keep within signalling distance, and when I required more cartridges, or my men had as many birds as they could well carry, I would signal, and it would come to me as fast as possible.

For to make big bags in the short winter days, there was not much time to lose; and the cartridge bags would be replenished and the birds put in the game box.

When the birds were abundant, I never allowed the dog to range, but kept him at heel, using him only to 'find dead.' For the snipe is a very wild bird, with but little scent, and a dog, however good and careful, would flush out of distance many more birds than he would point.

And even those birds that would lie to a point, and that the dog would stand, were so restless and uneasy that they would often flush before I could get to them, unless I happened to be near.

When the birds were at all abundant it was an exception, and a rare one, to kill a bird over a point.

When practicable, I shot down-wind, with a marker or beater walking quite abreast of me, about fifteen yards off; with two beaters, one on each side of me.

I would have the wagon meet me to leeward, and when I got to the end of the beat I would drive over the ground I had just beaten (so as not to disturb the rest of it) to windward, and take another parallel beat down-wind, and so on until I had shot all that ground out.

Oftener, however, I would begin on the weather side of the ground, and beat across wind.

My beaters, if I had more than one, were then both to leeward of me, the one next to me about fifteen yards off and somewhat behind me, the other the same distance from the first and a little behind him.

So, as snipe on rising generally fly to windward, I got shots at the birds rising, not only before me, but before my beater or beaters.

This would give me longer shots, but more of them.

In shooting up-wind — which from the lay of the ground I sometimes found it convenient to do — my marker would walk on a parallel line with me, about fifteen yards off and well behind — the wilder the birds, the farther behind; with two beaters, one on each side of me, I walking in the middle and well ahead.

Indeed, I reduced the shooting of the grounds to a system (to which, to a certain extent, was due my large bags), so as to get each day as many birds as possible, in as short a time as possible.

After a while, I became so familiar with the grounds, and got to know them so well, that I could generally, — though, of course, not always — form a pretty accurate idea of where the most birds were likely to be found under certain conditions of weather, amount of rainfall, etc.; and it pleased me more to kill fifty snipe, shooting the right grounds, at the right time, and working them in the right way, and getting all that was possible under the circumstances, than to kill a hundred and to have so muddled the shooting as not to have killed as many as I should have.

The birds being such great migrants, and only in the country for a short time, I had no mercy on them, and killed all I could, for a snipe once missed might never be seen again.

Very different from pheasants, partridges, and grouse, which if not got one day, or even one season, might be the next.

And let me here say, that every bird I killed was utilized — not one wasted; for the people of the country were not only a snipe-shooting but a snipe eating people, and the birds I gave away were highly appreciated by all sorts and conditions of men and women.

I, of course, gave a great many to the proprietors of the lands over which I shot, many to my neighbors, and, being not far from New Orleans, I sent many to friends there.

Though I am not a pot-hunter, I never cared to shoot game to be thrown away.

I never wore waterproofs, but shot in knicker-bockers and laced boots, and took the wet, changing my clothes after shooting; for the first eight or nine seasons, not until after reaching home — a mistake, for it was not only uncomfortable but unhealthy to drive so long and so far, sometimes in very cold weather, in wet clothes, at times wet almost to my waist in crossing coulees and deep places on the marsh; so after the first eight or nine seasons, I always changed on the ground before getting in the wagon.

For the first few seasons I shot with guns of Lang, Purdey, and Grant; afterwards, altogether with Purdey's hammer cylinder; then, when they came in, with hammerless choked (the perfection of guns, in my opinion) — they shot so hard, wore so well, and handled so beautifully as to leave nothing to be desired — weighing 6 lbs., 10 ozs.

I used No. 9 chilled shot, sometimes No. 8 for the left barrel; I stuck to black powder for a long time, for I always had a feeling that it shot stronger. Eventually, however, I used Schultz, though to the end I occasionally used black for the second barrel.

I shot with only one gun at a time; had no loader, but loaded my gun myself; had I shot with two guns and had a loader, I would, of course, have killed a great many more birds, but in those days and in those parts it was impossible to get a man that could be trusted to load, and it would have been hard to train a green hand; and even with an efficient loader, it would have been, at times, awkward for him to hand me a second gun, floundering about in the mud, as we often would have been.

Then, too, the drives to and from the grounds were sometimes so long, and the roads so bad, it was not easy to take to the field more attendants than were absolutely necessary.

From much practice, however, I became very expert and quick in loading. Keeping my cartridges loose in an open pocket, I slipped them in with great rapidity in a hot corner.

As a 'Cagian friend, who lived on Cypre-Mort, once said to me in his broken English: 'We, out here on Cypre-Mort, can always tell when you come home by de sound of your gun; no odor man ever shoots so quick like you.'

Though much exposed to wet and cold, I was never prevented from shooting by ailment of any kind, except once in the season of 1878–79, when I had a severe attack of rheumatic gout, complicated with malaria, but it did not prevent my killing that season 3085 snipe in twenty-nine days.

Take it all in all, considering the wildness and migratory habits of the birds, it was the most attractive and enjoyable shooting I ever experienced.

I shot almost altogether on the Camperdown and Cypre-Mort grounds; both very extensive inland marshes, with low prairies and sloughs adjacent, to which the birds resorted when the lower marshes were submerged.

In later years (though rarely, for they were too far off and inaccessible from the Snipery, and I only shot them when there were no, or few, birds on the inland marshes), the sea or brackish marshes of Bayou Cochon, Cow, Doe, and Baker Islands, and also 'Myers' Marsh.'

During the Civil War the Parish of St. Mary was overrun by the Federal troops under General Banks, and the greater part of the cattle which grazed on the prairies were carried off; the slaves were manumitted, and for the most part left the plantations, which were neglected and uncultivated; the fences were torn down or burned, and the drainage was destroyed.

So that when I began shooting the country, and for some time after, the abandoned and undrained plantations and the

SNIPES
From an etching by William Smith, 1822

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adjacent prairies afforded good feeding grounds for the snipe, which resorted to them when the lower grounds were submerged. And as the country was practically fenceless, I could drive across the unenclosed fields and prairies and pass with great facility from one ground to another, getting the cream of several grounds in a day's shooting.

As the country recovered from the ravages of the war, the abandoned lands were gradually fenced and reclaimed, and also the greater part of the outlying virgin prairie, which had heretofore been used as pasturage and never cultivated, was also enclosed and put under tillage.

And this was the case not only with the higher grounds, but with the lower marshes; for they, too, were ditched, and being drained by machinery, were also put in cultivation and so the snipe grounds were all eventually destroyed....

As snipe shooting was the specialty of the Snipery, my game-books were practically records of 'Snipe Shooting.'

The snipe killed on the unnumbered days were those I came across when shooting other game, or on parts of days, when for some reason or other I only shot for a short time, or parts of days in October and April, before the season began, or after it was ended; for the shooting, as a rule, began on the 1st of November, and ended in the latter part of March — about the 15th on an average.

In the beginning of the game-book all the days on which I went out at all are numbered as snipe-shooting days, and also parts of days in October and April, whether I shot an hour or a day; but this was misleading, as not giving an accurate account of the days shot. So latterly I only numbered as 'snipe-days' those on which I shot for at least two hours.

The number killed on these broken days did not amount to much in 'the twenty years,' though I have included them in the total, but have always noted the number killed on them.

On the other hand, before I had adopted this rule of not numbering the broken days, I had already numbered a good many parts of days on which I shot for only a short time, which I had counted as whole days, and which I have let so stand. In fact there are included in the total many more birds killed on parts of days, which are numbered as snipe or whole days, than on parts of days unnumbered.

My object in numbering the days was to know how one season compared with others. I have put down 'the Various' (Partridges, Woodcock, Wild Duck, Teal, Rail, etc.), though they are of no importance, for except on very few occasions — three or four only, when I went for woodcock, and on 'the Lake Arthur Expedition' for grouse — I never went in for anything but snipe, and only when shooting them, I killed of other birds those I came across, never going out of my way for them, but taking them in my stride.

I rarely killed two snipe at a shot; so rarely that I always made a note of it when I did.

As a rule, I have only made extracts of those days on which I killed 100 snipe or upwards, except occasionally of smaller bags, when made at the end of a month, when I summed up the total of that month's shooting, or when there was some unusual incident to be noted.

Living very much alone, it amused and interested me at the end of every day to note very fully the incidents and details of the day's shoot; the weather, amount of rain, condition of the grounds, where most of the birds were found, etc.

To do so not only amused and interested me, but was to a certain extent useful, as enabling me to judge more or less correctly what grounds it was best to shoot, at certain times and under certain conditions.

For instance, at the end of the fifth season, 1871–72, I had killed on the Camperdown grounds 8091 snipe in 85 days, and on the Cypre-Mort 8094 in 72½ days, shooting those grounds respectively on such days as I thought each would be most fit; on Jennerett to that date I had killed 966 — a total of 17,151 snipe in the five seasons.

It is owing to this habit of going so fully into details and giving so many particulars of each day's shoot in writing up the daily journal of my game-books, that I am able now to give so full an account of the twenty years' shooting.

These extracts, though much condensed, are almost verbatim from my game-books.

All the birds recorded in the following pages were killed *to my own gun.*

When I had friends shooting with me, the birds I killed were kept entirely separate from those shot by my companions. The man who carried my birds carried those of no one else, those killed by my friends being kept apart, they keeping their own scores.

The necessity of this is obvious, to keep my score continuously correct....

In the preceding pages I have given the salient features of 'the twenty years' snipe shooting,' which are chiefly the large bags of snipe, the number of those large bags, and the high average of each day's shooting.

I have had, in my time, shooting of many kinds, — of big game, Bear and Deer, and of winged game, a great variety; but take it all in all, I liked best the snipe shooting as I had in these twenty years with its pleasant surroundings.

Colonel Hawker calls snipe shooting 'The trout-fishing of shooting,' and I quite agree with him.

I have made many and copious extracts from my game-books which are pretty monotonous.

There must always be more or less monotony and repetition in the account of so many days' shooting; for after all, there is but little to tell, except that on each day I found more or less snipe and killed as many of them as I could.

I have, however, written this chiefly for my own amusement, and, perhaps, for the perusal of a few old friends, with whom, 'in the good old days of yore,' 'when the birds were rising fast on Cypre-Mort,' I had the pleasure of 'tramping over the marshy prairie,' and to recall to my mind many days of good sport and pleasant companionship.

Looking over my game-books, to make these extracts, has brought vividly and pleasantly to me the recollection of many big shoots and hard but enjoyable days in the bogs and sloughs of Camperdown and Cypre-Mort, and of those happy times when the glamour of youth was over everything, and of many old friends, most of whom have, alas! gone over to the great majority.

The life at the Snipery was not only a very sporting, but a very picturesque one.

There, and at Oaklawn, were among the very few instances where the old patriarchal life of the South survived the ravages of the civil war; its social dislocations, and the manumission of the slaves.

We were surrounded and served by our old slaves; and the wild shooting over the solitary marshes, the peculiar features of the country, with its beautiful live oaks, the wide expanse of prairie, dotted over with isolated groups of moss-covered trees, the seclusion and remoteness from the outer world, though sufficiently accessible when desirable, all gave a local coloring which was very unique and attractive.

> 'What years and ghosts rise up between then and now.'

I have appended several of the Snipery poems from 'Lays of the Snipery' by my gifted friend the late Miss Annie Porter, of Oaklawn; also an uncommonly clever shooting song by my friend, S. Nicholson Kane, written when he was on a visit to the Snipery.

I have also given at the end a few practical (not scientific) notes of the birds I shot, their weights, etc.

THE MAXIMUM

The Maximum — 366 *Snipe in Six Hours*

Let the huntsman chase the fox, let him course the timid hare;
Let the hunter track the lion or the tiger to his lair;
Let the Indian stalk the bison over fields of frozen snow;
Let the angler whip the stream for the timid trout below;
Let the sportsman praise the merits of the pheasant or the quail,
The duck, the cock, the prairie-hen, the partridge, or the rail;
I admit there are advantages in game of ev'ry type,
But I've never heard of beast or bird to excel the twisting snipe.

Chorus:

Then come with me to Cypre-Mort, I'll show you what I mean,
For the birds are lying close where the marsh is growing green;
With their 'chape-chape-chape,' 'tis the gamest thing that flies —
And 'mark that bird, you rascal, where the devil are your eyes?'

In the silent Newfoundland are the barrens where they breed,
Near the sunny Bayou Teche lie the marshes where they feed:
Three thousand miles and more, they have followed down the sun,
By land and sea they come to me to fall beneath my gun.
And this morning I shall shoot them over Pellerin and Penn:
For I shall make a better bag than ever yet has been.
They have gathered from the uplands, they have flown from off the leas,
And to-day they'll lie as still 'as stones and thick as bumble-bees.'

Chorus: Then come with me, etc.

Let the sluggard lie abed — I am off for Cypre-Mort,
With a dog at heel behind, and a wisp of snipe before;
Now 'Mark!' 'Where?' 'There!' Hear the cracking of the gun?
God bless me! 'twas a sporting shot, and that was number *one*.
I skirt the edge of Dumesnil, a bog on either hand,
And as we go 'tis 'Steady, so! the dog is at a stand!'
Now a hundred on the gun! Ah! my boy, it would not do,
For the Purdey tells its story, and this is number *two*.

Chorus: Then come with me, etc.

Mark the driver from the sedges; yes, but mark that curl of
smoke;
As quick his flight as rays of light, but quicker is the choke.
The shot goes surging to him, and turning round and round,
No cripple there, but dead in air, he tumbles to the ground.
Shoot them when they first get up and twist against the wind,
Shoot them when they come across, or try to fly behind,
Shoot them right and left when they're rising up in pairs,
High or low, or how they go, the Snipist never cares.

Chorus: Then come with me, etc.

And when the day is over, and the gun behind the door,
I light the pipe and count the snipe in rows upon the floor.
Forty, fifty, sixty, sixty-six from Dumesnil,
And fifteen score from Cypre-Mort, with a brace or two of teal.
To single gun, the bag was won, before the sun was set,
My eye was quick and birds were thick on Penn and Jennerett,
On Pellerin, on Dumesnil, Patout and Longinais —
With one for every minute through a quarter of the day!

Chorus: Then come with me, etc.

Now bring the cup and fill it up and let the fire burn,
The kindly blaze to other days my memories will turn,
Through the glowing embers see my comrades come again,
And with 'Otho' and 'Old Henry' I am walking in the fen,
And as the shadows flicker and dance upon the wall
More dear to me the 'Snipery' than castle or than hall,
For fifty thousand spirit snipe come flying through the door,
And as I doze, they fall in rows before me on the floor.

Chorus: Then come with me, etc.

Then here's a toast to every ghost and all that yet can fly,
For twisting snipe's the gamest type of bird beneath the sky.
But though the cup be brimming, my heart is fuller yet,
When I pledge them now, the gentle friends I never can forget;
For theirs the kindly faces that have welcomed me at night,
And theirs the genial graces that have made my life so bright —

With their poetry, wit, music, how the pleasant hours have gone.
Then fill it high, and drain it dry, to the 'Ladies of Oaklawn.'

Chorus: Then come with me, etc.

S. Nicholas Kane

The Snipery
Oaklawn, Bayou Teche
February, 1880

RETROSPECTION

Back! back! let my memory stray o'er the years
Which lie farther behind me, alas! than before —
Recall those blest moments, unmarred by the fears
Or the passions of men, and live through them once more.

Oh, the days when the flash and the crack of my gun
Answered quick to the call of the snipe as they rose;
And their shadows, down dropping, 'twixt me and the sun,
Mutely told of the numbers my bag would disclose!

In the flush of the morning when Nature was still,
And I sprang from the wagon, 'twas pleasant to feel
How pulses and muscles and strong nerves would thrill
As I hied the dogs on from their place at my heel.

The steady tramp forward, the smell of the grass,
As it swayed right and left, or was crushed neath my feet,
The splash of the water, the yielding morass —
Oh, the sights and the sounds of those mornings were sweet!

Though the smoke of my Purdey incessantly rolled,
And the 'chape' of the snipe was ne'er lost on my ear,
I saw every cloud in the heavens unfold,
And Nature's least echo of life did I hear.

Every feather that's worn by the birds of the air,
Every call that they utter, was pleasure to me,
And Nature wore never an aspect less fair —
Though floods were descending and tempests were free.

What stretches I traversed of prairie and field!
What bogs and what sloughs I passed through in a day!
Dumesnil and Baudin their full quota must yield,
And never forgotten be far Longinais.

Oh, Cypre-Mort! Camperdown! long may thy plains
To the heart of the sportsman be honored and dear;
When no recollection of Pringle remains
May the 'chape' of the snipe echo frequent and clear!

For gratefully still does my memory turn
To the low-lying marshes and rush-hidden fens.
Provost! Pellerin! ah, the toil was stern!
But on! we must finish the day's work at Penn's.

Many miles well tramped over, they did not seem long,
And swiftly the winter days drew to a close;
Then one draught e'er leaving, one generous and strong!
The wagon, and oh! the blest sense of repose.

How pleasant to settle down handling the reins,
And feel the good horses respond to the call;
A fast, steady trot homewards over the plains —
No darkness could stop us, no bog-holes appal.

The Harding woods reached, scarce a dim ray of light
E'er pierced through the shadows to show us the way;
Yet still would we manage to come out all right,
And then a clear road between us and home lay.

So away with a rush we'd go, thinking afar
Of the dinner that smoked at the end of the drive,
Of a fire which shone, a familiar home-star,
And the faces that brightened to see us arrive.

At last, drawing up to the small cottage door,
Master, markers, and dogs would alight,
Somewhat stiff in the joints, while spread on the floor
Would the bag be first counted aright!

And then reeking hot, just one strong cup of tea,
As I stretched for a while by the fire;

My bath heated just to a certain degree,
  How grateful the feeling of warmth 'twould inspire!

Then refreshed like a giant, and hungry as one,
  The hour of dinner would find me prepared,
Each thought that could trouble me vanished and gone,
  And only the brightest and pleasantest spared.

A. P.

XI

HENRY'S BIRDS

Hamblen Sears

1899

I

Practically speaking, Henry Eldridge was a genius; and if his lines had been cast in smoother places he might, and no doubt would, have astounded humanity by his inexhaustible resources. As it was, Henry, nominally a builder of carriages, also built himself houses in which, one after another, he lived; and many a time have I seen him pause in the midst of his work — he paused often — to take a huge and ancient bull-fiddle from its corner, and for half an hour play some absurd jig upon its decrepit strings. At certain periods in the prosecution of his decayed wheelwright trade, his fiddling, and his house-building, he would descend into the cellar of one of the houses, carefully open a locked cupboard, and pour out half a tumbler of the most magnificent home-made elderberry wine that ever touched the lips of wheelwrights or of fiddlers. This he would look at long and fondly. Then filling the rest of the tumbler with Jamaica rum, he would drink it off at a gulp, and snatch a short twenty minutes from his many occupations to sit upon a barrel-head and gaze with unswerving thoughtfulness upon the cheeses and rafters of the roof.

This, however, was not by any means the limit of Henry's versatility. It had no limit. His genius suited itself to the season. On the appearance of the first black duck sailing over the dunes of Cape Cod, Henry would calmly and seriously close the door of his wheelwright shop, tenderly lay away the bull-fiddle, and leave the last unfinished house to stand or fall, as it should decide. The time had come for other things; and taking one more sip of the wine of his heart, he would call to him his thirty tame ducks, put them in their movable crib, and urging his worn-out, motheaten steed, make all haste to reach Cliff Pond and his shooting-box. Once there, with the ducks flying, he would remain till late winter, making uncertain descents upon his home and family for food, but always returning as soon as possible to the 'pawnd.'

It did not trouble Henry, if it ever occurred to him, that Cape Cod, and especially Brewster, had been shot out years ago; that ten to fifteen brace of duck was an enormous day's work. He did not shoot to kill; he had the truest sporting spirit, the spirit that enjoyed tricking the game; and he was as satisfied with one duck well shot as with a hundred merely slaughtered. What did cause him to pour forth the vials of his wrath, however — bitter vials they were, too, accompanied by a most extraordinary variety of language — was to find that he had harbored in his bosom, that is to say, in his shooting-stand, a tenderfoot, a man who did not know enough to refrain from sneezing when ducks were in the pond, or who insisted on slapping his freezing ears at the moment an enormous gander was walking deliberately over the waves into gunshot. Then neither ducks nor geese, neither courtesy nor the tender senses of those present, were considered by Henry. Everything was forgotten in the immediate necessity he felt for stating in his high nasal tones the views he entertained as to the propriety of such persons being in warmer places than Cliff Pond, or even the earth upon which that pond rested.

It was not a surprise to me, therefore, to receive an epistle from Henry one cold January day, to the effect that if I would leave New York at once and make all haste to Brewster, I would find 'that the' — and at this point in the letter there appeared a peculiar drawing resembling a number of jackstones arranged in the form of an irregular 'V' — 'were flying.' Knowing Henry's humorous vein, I surmised that this must be his method of referring to geese, and forthwith I departed.

It was a cold, bleak night when the laboring train, tired with its many stops and starts, pulled up at the Brewster Station. Darkness had come on, and as the lights of the cars disappeared to the eastward and the gloom settled down over the little lonesome station, the wind whistled and moaned through the telegraph wires, and I could see nothing but the bleak, uneventful landscape of stunted firs and stone walls melting off into the darkness. It might have been a hundred miles to the nearest human being, except for one light down the rutted road, the particular house which Henry, his wife, and seven children happened at that moment to be occupying. There was nothing for it but to trudge through the sleet and melted snow, with my two guns in one hand and a big grip in the other.

I found on arriving at the house that, as is their wont in this heart of Puritanism, events and circumstances had conducted themselves in their own original fashion. It appeared that the geese had suddenly departed, but that in their place had come redheads and mallards and black ducks; and thus I began a fortnight of duck-shooting over Henry's tame decoys.

II

Many a sportsman of the better sort continues to condemn the practice of shooting game over tame decoys. It would be useless to deny his argument. Frankly speaking, the only sportsman-like conduct in hunting shore birds, as in hunting other game, is to crawl up on them by sheer sporting skill, and kill them in their own country, so to speak, with every chance on their side. Shooting over wooden decoys, however, has come to be acknowledged as allowable to sportsmen. The wooden 'coys are set out on a point; the flying birds see them, swing above them for a first look, and are shot with one barrel as they light, with the other just as they start to fly away. Shooting over tame ducks is simply a much more exciting, vastly more skilful piece of work of the same kind. For a spot where ducks fly constantly these tame birds are not necessary, but on such shot-out ground as Cape Cod they add greatly to the science of the sport.

Henry had a carefully regulated plan for training his decoys, and it was a constant source of surprise and interest to me to watch the workings of this peculiar system. When carefully nurtured, the intelligence of such a stupid bird as a barnyard duck is something extraordinary. But the training must be constant and daily, and before a bird is fit for decoy-work practically two seasons have been consumed. The lessons begin and turn on the question of food. Henry made it his first study to compel his friends to trust him so thoroughly that he could pick them up and put them in his pocket head downward at any time, with the certainty that on being returned to the ground they would simply rustle their feathers and shrewdly cock one eye up at him to await the never-failing handful of corn. It has always been a question with me whether he himself had not more of the duck in him than the human being, for he could imitate duck-calls of all kinds in a manner that would not only attract wild game, but would bring the gun to your shoulder as you walked along the shore in his vicinity. One good sportsman who used to call himself my friend, not only shot (and afterwards paid for) one of Henry's decoys as she stood tied to a rock, but actually lay among the stones of the beach half an hour one early morning under the impression that Henry's constant calls came from a flock of birds just behind the stand.

After bringing these strange waddling pets of his to a maudlin state of tameness, he never failed to set up a most complicated and continuous series of duck-quacks and calls whenever he threw out their food. It was not long, therefore, before the birds associated corn with Henry's extraordinary imitations of duck Bedlam, and as any self-respecting bird is bound to quack vociferously immediately upon seeing food, it became a consequence quite within the compass of the duck-mind to infer that whenever Henry quacked, corn was near at hand and shortly to be forthcoming. The result was an instantaneous symphony. Consequently, by the end of the summer a duck of reasonably high birth was sure to set up a hysterical song the moment he or she caught the sounds of Henry's voice. Whether Henry actually understood duck language and discussed points of interest with the birds I do not know. At all events, he understood a system which brought forth calls and shrieks from every one of his thirty pets whenever he saw fit to put it in operation.

Having proceeded thus far, it became his next duty to teach the birds to fly — a sufficiently original occupation to illustrate the extensive scope, the many-sided character of Henry's genius. This he practised gradually with each bird in his barn-yard, always appealing to the duck's appetite. He would grasp one of them around the body with both hands, her head meantime pointing outward. Then bending his knees and lowering the neophyte close to the ground, he would rise steadily but swiftly and hurl the bird into the air. Instinctively she put out her wings and circled around the barn-yard, descending gradually, and at the same time setting up a most hopeless racket, naturally starting the other twenty-nine, who fancied this was Henry calling them to dinner.

As the duck's wings were clipped, she naturally could not fly away; hence she soon alighted near by, and waddled comfortably back into the yard to secure the handful of corn. Here was another long and weary stage of training, during which Henry's remarkable persistency and energy, his 'infinite capacity for taking pains,' were constantly to be noted. The decayed wheelwright trade and the struggle with the half-completed houses were not, in Henry's opinion, sufficiently ennobling occupations to demand an exhibition of this capacity which lay within him. It required something extraordinary, something like teaching birds to fly.

After months of trial and tribulation, with sometimes a broken back and a consequent duck funeral, the birds grasped the meaning of this peculiar flight; and Henry could then stand behind his barn-yard fence and, by throwing up one bird after another, give you and any stray wild ducks flying past the impression that there was a duck Valhalla in the vicinity.[1]

At the time of my arrival all this had been finished. Henry was shooting day after day at the old stand, which he maintained physically while several of us maintained it financially. The birds themselves were by this time just as much at home going through their duties at the pond as they had ever been in the farm-yard. Henry regretted, he said, that the geese were elsewhere collecting some other sportsman's shot in their feathers; but ducks were filling the pond every morning, and they might serve my purpose. This was what I heard after Mrs. Eldridge had kindly taken off my coat and the elder daughter had put my grip in the one unused, and therefore abnormally cold, room in the house. Henry's son relieved me of both the guns, promptly took them out of their cases, and, putting them together, sat in a corner fondling and admiring them until after twelve that night. Meanwhile Henry and I sat with our feet on the stove, while the children brought me all their choice possessions out of the one room which five shared jointly. And all this while the New England northeast wind whistled along over the sand-hills outside.

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[1] This description of training decoy ducks must not be taken literally. The wings of course were never clipped.

In an indefinable way there were comfort and hospitality about the whole place, something that made you feel thankful you were born a New-Englander, and that New England Yankeeism was still running along better than a good third in the race. Henry had perhaps as little politeness as any human being could have, and yet his very lack of it, his gruff, familiar manner, his offer of his worst — that is to say, his best — black stub of a clay pipe, was distinctly hospitable. Here were his seven children and wife within one room talking to me on all sides. Yet none was sent away. There was nothing to be ashamed of in them. They were all his. The dirt upon their faces was his. He had with his own hands put every board in its proper place on the walls and roof that sheltered us. To-morrow we would drive to the pond in a carriage made by himself, and though he had not built the horse, he had at least paid for it. Henry had little or no money, but he owed not a cent; and he could look any man, whether from New England or old England, or from the South or West, in the eye, telling him he was as good as he, and no mistake. Even Henry's stories were his own. They had a picturesque, original charm that is indescribable. They were of ducks and guns, and sometimes of men. They included good shots and bad misses, and a shrewd word or two on your dealings with men, and your safest plan of being honest with a fellow as the best way of making him honest with you.

As time wore on and the stories grew to that delicious type wherein the 'pawnd' — which is two miles long — 'were covered s' thick with ducks th't yer couldn't see the water, 'nd I wuz just on th' point uv pulling both barrels, when' — as this time of the evening approached, Henry, with his serious air and silent tread, disappeared down the perpendicular stairway into his cellar, to return ten minutes later with some of that home-made elderberry that would have made the eyes of the hot stove water if it had had any. And as I sipped my portion and Henry gulped his down, it dawned upon me that it was eleven o'clock, and that at two in the morning I was to be bundled out of bed to begin the six-mile drive to Cliff Pond.

III

There is nothing that could be more disagreeable than to be waked at 1.30 in the morning of a January day, or rather night, with but three short hours of sleep to your credit; and yet after a hopeless regret that I had undertaken the journey at all, and a bitter yearning for New York city and five hours more of repose, I managed to get out of bed, wash and dress by candlelight, and drink a cup of coffee before two. Then the day began. We proceeded to the barn-yard, and while I harnessed the horse by candlelight, Henry caught the ducks and put them into their box, which was thereupon loaded upon the wagon. By twenty minutes after two we were under way for Cliff Pond, and then any yearning for home that in a weak moment the flesh might have felt was changed to congratulations by the cold night breeze. For the drive through the silent firs and pines six miles up into the Cape set the blood tingling in my body. Henry smoked and said nothing. He was already beginning to feel the excitement of the sport, and the presence of the softly squeaking ducks, the guns, the uncertainty of what might be already resting upon the pond, were quite sufficient to make me excited too.

It was after three when we came within a quarter of a mile of the pond. Then every sound ceased about our caravan, except the soft conversations and occasional arguments of the uncomfortably crowded birds. Henry indicated, partly by whispers and partly by motions and pushes, that I was to descend. The horse was silently secured to a tree in a sheltered ravine. Henry took the ducks on his shoulders, and I carried the four guns and the cartridges as we silently stumbled up over a rising ground through the snow.

The journey through the trees continued for five minutes without other noise than the softly whistling wind and the movements of the ducks, who had been considerably upset during their transfer from the wagon to Henry's shoulders. It was so dark in the woods that at times I failed to distinguish Henry's form from the surrounding trees, and it was with some surprise, therefore, that I suddenly bumped against him. He had stopped before the door of what seemed to be a one-room shanty, and was in the act of unfastening the padlock. As we stood there I heard a peculiar, lapping noise, which resolved itself a moment later into the sound of small waves on a gravel beach. But nothing of water nor of beach was to be seen.

Henry now had the door open, and we entered — ducks, guns, and all. He then conveyed to me in whispers the information that we must station the ducks at once, as day would break in about half an hour, and naturally everything must be done before then. Whereupon he opened a door at the opposite end of the hut, and let the ducks out of their cramped position. Following them through the door I found, principally by the sense of touch, that we were in a species of chicken or duck yard, some ten feet wide and twenty-five feet long, running down into what soon turned out to be the waters of the pond.

This stand was of the usual pond or lake type. The hut had been set back among the pines and cedars, and as they had no leaves to shed in winter, they completely covered the little house from top to bottom. The yard, or stand proper, was surrounded by a five-foot board fence, banked up outside with small firs and pines to imitate an enormous pile of brush. And Henry had brought his architectural gray matter into requisition to construct gates leading out to the beach at either side, with small openings in them through which the ducks could enter or leave the stand. At the end of the yard, which abutted on the water's edge, he had drawn on the military portion of his inexhaustible store of knowledge and constructed two bastion-like wings, one of which permitted the gunners to fire eastward, and the other westward, while the stand itself faced to the north. By running a low bench along this lower end he had made it possible for those inside to kneel and fire one barrel through the loop-holes, and then jump up and take the second barrel on the wing over the top of the stand.

All this was observed largely without the use of eyes while Henry was opening the gates and taking some of the ducks outside. And in this bitterly cold water, which froze on the ducks' feathers as soon as it touched them, we tied those unoffending creatures by the leg to a cord which ran out on the water and disappeared in the darkness. It appeared that this glacial cord was a 'runner,' and that it extended out into the pond four hundred feet to a pulley in the end of a long pole, which was anchored in such a manner as to be held just under the surface. The line running through this returned to the stand, passed through a small hole to the inside, and out again through another, until, at the end of its eight-hundred-foot journey, it joined itself and formed a circuit.

To this the ducks were tied one by one with a leather noose. As one bird was fastened and dropped into the icy water I pulled in on the other part of the rope and gently forced Mistress Duck three or four feet out on the black water. Thus in a few moments we had what to any wild duck, to say nothing of any tame man, would appear to be a flock of birds swimming about at random and raising a horrible racket in all this silence of the night. The thing was repeated with more ducks, on another and similar endless runner, which ran to another spot on the pond.

This done, Henry directed me to pull first one and then the other flock out to the pulleys, while he moved up and down the beach and stationed eight or ten solitary ducks at intervals, after the manner in which any other mortal would have tied dogs or anchored boats. Each of these had a yard or more of rope, and each could paddle in the water or climb up the beach, squawking all the time to her heart's content.

The exterior preparations having been completed, we returned to the stand and thrust the rest of the educated thirty into boxes. Everything was now ready, and still the night was as dark as ever. Henry betook himself to the shanty to lie down, but I could not leave the night. There was nothing to do but wonder what manner of bird, and how many, might be still farther out in the pond; and to listen to the sound of the little waves singing to an accompaniment of the soft night breeze in the firs, and to the startling quack of those frozen ducks out on the water.

At last it came almost suddenly, a great streak to the eastward; then a little more; then everything about the place seemed to have a lifting motion. Trees began to stand up; the water rose as the horizon widened. The light to the eastward changed from gray to white, and I could make out the opposite shore, a long black line. Finally the white changed to red, deeper and deeper, and rising ever higher. All sorts of noises seemed to wake, and everything, even the sky, went on rising slowly and gracefully.

Suddenly I felt a keen vise grasping my arm just above the elbow, and turned to see Henry's sharp face looking out into the middle of the pond, with one of his long fingers pointing through the branches at something which in time resolved itself into a black line on the water.

Ducks, surely ducks, and seven — eight — nine — ten of them, too! Neither of us breathed more than was necessary for a moment. Then Henry became a duck — that is to say, he emitted quacks by the dozen — and the birds on the runners, those anchored along the shore, and those in the boxes at our feet set up an answering note that must have told wonders to their wild cousins out in the pond. The work was fairly begun now, and it lasted two long hours. Each of us took up a duck and scaled her, waiting after each 'cast' to watch her circle around the stand until she flew shrieking out on the water. Another and another followed until they were all gone. Then, as the corn Henry threw out attracted their attention, they trotted back through the holes in the fence and came forward to be scaled again and again. One bad scholar grew obstreperous, and evidently decided on going over to the enemy. But Henry took Aunty in his arms — Aunty, it should be understood, was his duck of ducks — and after conversing with her for a moment, hurled her into the air. She circled and screamed and settled on the water as the others had before her, but she had no sooner touched the surface of the pond than she swam straight out after the deserter, passed him, headed him off, and pecked at him until he gave up the spree and returned homeward in disgrace.

Meantime we kept a glass on the mystic ten, and gradually became more and more certain that they were moving over to see what extraordinary feeding-grounds their cousins must have found.

Five hundred yards, by the mark! Three hundred and nearer!

Henry paused and loaded the four double-barrel guns without making a sound, jerked the runners to start the two flocks singing again, and then returned to the charge. Still they came on, until they were within fifty yards of our birds on the runners. Then something happened. Possibly we struck the barrel of a gun against the side of a loop-hole. Perhaps the click of a cocking hammer reached them. At any rate, the mystic ten turned and swam away. Tears came into my eyes so that I could not see, and I heard Henry muttering to the bushes words and phrases and things one would rather have left unsaid. But the ten waggled their tails in our faces as they continued to move off.

A punch from Henry and a jab he made at a duck caused me to grasp another, and the business of hurling these unoffending creatures into the air was resumed.

The wild ones turned again and started back. The distance lessened moment by moment, and at last we had them in the very midst of the decoys on the east runner. A method of procedure arranged between us beforehand was now put into effect. Henry took the left side of the stand, and slowly and cautiously pulled in on the runner. The decoys, whether they would or no, were forced to move in also, and with them came the wild birds, as if fascinated. In an instant they were a little less than fifty yards away, and with the most feverish care each man took his gun by the butt as it lay ready in position pointed through the loop-hole. Each covered his side of the flock and waited.

Henry directed the charge, and I was to delay till I heard him count 'one' — 'two' — firing at the time when he should say 'three.' It seemed a very long wait. First he was forced to delay till the wild birds separated themselves completely from the tame; and even then he waited until the former had grouped themselves into comprehensive range. That delay was a strain on one's nerves, and it was almost in a dream that I heard his husky, whispered count begin. I pulled mechanically, and in the smoke jumped upon the bench. Catching a glimpse of a black object rising off to the right, I fired a snap-shot. But he came down like a plummet, and as the smoke of the second charge cleared away eight birds lay dead on the water, one was swimming directly away, and the tenth was trying to fly. The second guns came into play, and two reports settled the ninth and tenth birds; and Henry's little water-spaniel had a deal of swimming to bring them all in.

If you are a sportsman, you are saying at this moment,

STON
UBLIC
BRARY

AFTER SUNSET
From an etching by Frank W. Benson

'That is no sport; it is slaughter.' In a measure, judged by the highest standards, that is true; but you deceived the duck when you crawled up on him, and I deceived him when I made him crawl up on me. It is not in the strictest sense the ideal of sport; but, on the other hand, it is neither mean nor unworthy of a good sportsman. And the study, preparation, time, money, and excitement of it all far surpass the practice of crawling up on the bird or of shooting over wooden 'coys.

Twelve o'clock found us again at Henry's home, in the midst of Henry's family, and before Mrs. Eldridge's boiled turnips, boiled potatoes, boiled beef, and boiled coffee. We had scarcely finished when Henry beckoned me to follow, and with the entire family looking the other way, we descended those sacred cellar stairs. There was the cupboard, there was the row of small demijohns within, and as this was a special occasion, I sipped my portion while sitting on a soap-box, and watched Henry indulge in an extra bumper. And then suddenly I was gone to make up for lost time and to sleep for hours, while Henry went out and unlocked his shop door, to see if any of the wheels had gone round during his absence.

IV

At six we were all at supper, even to the baby, who insisted on preferring my food to her own. One of the mystic ten graced the table, but he did not taste as that boiled beef and boiled coffee had at noon. Henry considered the whole history a famous one, and before he had finished telling it the fifth time, it was quite evident that a week hence the story would take its place among those which began with the usual statement that the water in the pond was invisible, owing to the number of ducks on its surface. Mrs. Eldridge seemed to appreciate this fact, for she frequently suggested to Henry that it would be wiser for him to eat more and brag less, and requested me to refrain from crediting all his 'fearful lies.'

It was a good supper, however, and as Henry and I resolved ourselves into two spokes of a wheel, with the stove for the hub, the seven children again proceeded to produce their possessions and hold them up for my admiration, laboring under the impression that I had failed to notice them the night before. Henry talked on again in his keen, half-generous way of ducks and guns and men, and told new stories of all, and made new and equally original criticisms on the last of these three intimates of his. When I attacked his live-decoy shooting from the sportsman's point of view, he had enough of the true sport in him to agree that it was, or at least had been, frowned upon deservedly. But, as he said, 'It's killin' of 'em by deceivin' 'em, and that's what th' other, the wooden kyind, is too, some'at.' As we sat there he advanced his idea of sport and of slaughter, and then we drifted off, as anybody will under such circumstances, into discussions on religion, business, and politics. Through it all ran that same Yankee, practical view which seems to go so well with a sharp nose and big kindly eyes, which is satire in its best sense rather than sarcasm, which seems to grasp the pith of a matter, and to have a rugged integrity that demands for itself considerate and honest attention, whether the question be of politics or religion or ducks.

So the tenth and twelfth pipes were smoked out, and the lamps began to splutter, when I told Henry that I must have a full three-hours' sleep that night, or he might not be able to get me up at two in the morning a second time. But as I stood up to take a candle from the mantel, he quietly forced me back into my seat, deliberately replaced my feet on the rim of the stove, and with his serious mien descended his ladder-like cellar stairway, reappearing again with two tumblers of that same elderberry.

One lamp went completely out, as if disgusted; but we stood by the stove in the light of the other, and I sipped and he gulped again. Then both of us sat down, and gazed at the rafters and the cobwebs of the roof for full twenty minutes, and I felt that such a day was one that gave a suggestion of the value of living; and that, after all, it is a good thing to be out in the woods of New England shooting ducks, drinking home-made elderberry wine, and having the infinite satisfaction of being a New-Englander yourself.

XII

A RED–LETTER DAY

Edwyn Sandys

1905

The sun looms large above a sea of gauzy haze which piles like airy surf against the forest's rim. It is a windless, dreamy morning, rich with the magic of the Indian summer, the glory of painted leaves, the incense of ripe fruit. In the full fatness of autumn's latter days the world is songless, silent, fat. Those things which sleep — that drowse the long, white silence soon to be — are round well-nigh to bursting. Those things that durst not face the nip of steel-skied nights have fled to kindlier climes, while those other things which neither sleep nor flee are revelling in a rich abundance. They know what must come when Kee-way-din whines about their brushy eaves and the strange, cold white feathers fall. They know that the brushy and still leafy cover will be flattened and that the white wolf of the North will plunge and ramp and howl across far leagues of whiteness. They know the present business of their kind is to eat — eat till craws and skins are tight as drumheads, to wax fat because fat things do not freeze, while they can, if need be, doze for days when times are bad. All this eating and fat content is lazy business and sleep lasts long.

Up in the pleasant room, too, Sleep herself sits by a narrow cot upon which lies a silent figure. The kindly goddess knows that under her spell men do no wrong, and so, with light hand laid across his eyes, she sits and watches. Through open windows streams a scented air, fruity from near-by orchards and spiced with the breath of drying foliage.

Thump! A big apple parts its failing stem and strikes a hollow roof. The figure stirs and Sleep flies on soundless feet. Gradually the man gets himself dressed and then he looks the workman. The loose cord breeches closely match the broad-soled, flat-heeled knee-boots; the sweater has the shade of the dried grass, and the old canvas coat admirably matches it. 'Tis a marvel, that coat — a thing of beauty and a joy forever to its owner — a horror unspeakable to his female kin. One had described it as 'A snarl of pockets held together by some remnants of filthy canvas,' and the owner had merely smiled. To him every stain upon it was a precious thing, a sign-board pointing to a dear-prized memory, and he wouldn't trade it for the mantle of Elijah. Once, a fair young thing, a frequent guest, who was clever at giving the last touch to ties and an invaluable adviser in regard to manicure sets, had declared she'd 'wash that horrid jacket!' and thus a glimmering possibility of a — a — oh! bother — it didn't come off, anyhow!

But the little woman who met him this morning was not of that sort. Once, long before, he had explained to her the difference between shooting for count and shooting as a sportsman should, and why there was no advantage in getting upon Bob White ground too early. She knew that fifteen birds was his limit so far as that particular game was concerned, and she also knew that the fifteen and perhaps some other game would load that coat at night, if all went well. So when he had nearly finished breakfast, she slipped away, to presently return amid a tumult of scratching claws and gusty breathing.

'Here — he — is — and — I — gave — him — just — three — bits!' she panted, as the strong brute strained at the chain in his eagerness.

'Down — you!' muttered the man, and as the quivering form sank promptly, he continued — 'Mater mine, thou fibbest — he don't lick his chops that way after straight bread.'

'Merely an atom of gravy, dear — just a drop was kept, and the bread is so dry and he chews at it so.'

'Grease — faugh! will you never learn?' he growls, but his eyes are twinkling and he has to avert his face to keep from laughing outright, for this question of dog-fare is a rock upon which they regularly split. Right well he knows that Don has had his bread, a trifle of meat, and perhaps about a pint of soupy stuff to boot; but he wisely makes no further comment, for the mistake was lovingly made.

And so they fare forth, a varmint-looking team, both lean and hard, the long, easy stride of the man hinting of many days afoot, the corky action of the dog proving him sound and keen. 'Tis true his ribs show as though his hide covered a spiral spring, but his white coat has a satiny lustre, and he puts his feet down as though such things as thorns and burrs had never been. Behind them stands the little figure watching with moist eyes, for one is hers and the other belongs to one of hers. Though they went and returned one thousand times in safety, — still — still — it might — be. Wonderful are thy ways, O woman!

At the corner the tall figure halts and right-about-faces with military precision, the gun is whipped through the salute, and at the instant the white dog rises erect upon his hind feet. Both man and dog know that all these things must be done before rounding the turn, else the day would not be all it should. A kerchief flutters in the distance, then they pass in a few strides from town to country.

Before them spreads a huge pasture, beyond that a grove of mighty trees, and beyond that the shooting grounds — farm after farm, with here a bit of woods and there a thicket. For miles the country is the same, and through it all, in a bee-line, extends the double track of an important railway. Along either side of this runs a broad ditch, now bone-dry and bordered with low catbriers. These and the ripe weeds standing thickly in the angles of the rail-fences form rare good cover for scattered birds.

'Well, Mister,' says the man to the dog, 'guess you'd better have a pipe-opener right here.' He waves his hand and clucks softly, and the dog sails away over the short fall grass. A judge of dogs would watch this pointer with solid satisfaction. So smooth is his action and so systematic is his method of covering ground, that his tremendous speed is not at first apparent. But for all that he is a flier which few dogs can stay with, and best of all he can keep going for a week if need be.

Of course, he naturally was a fine animal, blessed with courage and brains a plenty, but his owner's method — 'keep sending 'em,' as he termed it — has done much to develop the speed. Needless to say, at the forward end of that dog is a nose — for woe unto the animal that would attempt such a clip without the very finest thing in the way of a smeller.

Half an hour later the man halts on top of a fence while the dog takes a roll. They are now on the edge of the good ground, and both feel just right after their preliminary canter. The man fills his pipe, gets it nicely going, then looks at the gun across his knees. It appears almost like a toy; but its small tubes are of the best and can throw lead with amazing power. Almost plain, but perfect of its pattern, that gun cost about three times what an unsophisticated person might guess as its price, and, as its owner declared, it was well worth the money.

'Now, Mister,' says the man, after a bit, 'there's rag-weed, standing corn, and thicket — which would you advise?' The dog sits up and stares with loving intentness, and the man continues — 'When a lemon-headed fool-dog looks at me after that manner he certainly means standing corn, so here goes.' At the words he lets himself down, while the dog darts away. Soon he is into his regular stride and beating the ground with beautiful precision. The man watches and nods his head as he mutters, 'That rat-tailed rascal's going great guns to-day, he'll have 'em befo——' In the middle of a stride the dog has halted as though smitten by lightning. Some message of the air has reached that marvellous nose, and the grand brute stands as though carved in marble. There was no roading, no feeling for it, just an instantaneous propping and a breathless halt. 'That's funny,' mutters the man; 'I'd have sworn — ha!' There is an abrupt rising of a brown, hasty-winged thing which goes darting for a distant cover. At the sight the lazy man suddenly changes. The little gun leaps to the level, and before the butt has fairly touched the shoulder, the quick smokeless has hurled its leaden greeting. The bird goes down, unmistakably clean killed, while the dog slowly sinks to his haunches. As the man reloads, his face fairly shines with joy. 'Fifty yards if an inch,' he says to himself, 'and a bruising old hen at that. Who'd have expected a woodcock this time of year and away out here?' Then he goes to the dog and clucks him on.

As the dog has seen the bird fall, he merely makes a few bounds forward and again stiffens within two yards of an unusually large female woodcock — one of those choice birds only occasionally picked up at the tail-end of the season. 'Don't like that, eh?' laughs the man as he holds the bird near the dog's nose. The grand eyes are bulging with controlled excitement, but the shapely muzzle is wrinkled into an expression highly suggestive of disgust. 'Wish I understood that. It's funny, but you don't like a dead cock though you'll stop on 'em fast enough when alive — eh, old boy?' chuckles the man. 'Here, take it,' he says, and the dog obeys. 'Give it to me,' continues the man, and the dog promptly drops the bird into the hand, then wrinkles his chops as though an unpleasant flavor remained. It's a grand bird, old and fat, and the druggist's scales later prove it to weigh full eight ounces, an extreme weight for even a female, which is larger than the male.

When again started, the dog sweeps away to a low-lying bit where the withered corn is taller and thicker. Here he circles rapidly, stops for a moment, then stands looking at his master. The man moves over to him, and closely examining the ground presently detects half-a-dozen small hollows and a tiny brown feather. 'Flushed, eh?' he says to the dog, and evidently the latter agrees. Now the man's own tracks show plainly, there are no other bootmarks, nor has he seen an empty shell anywhere; so he knows the flush has been owing to natural cause. 'Mebbe hawk,' he says to himself. 'If so, where?' His eyes rove over all the surrounding cover and settle upon a clump of thicket in a corner. It is about far enough and certainly looks promising. Away goes the dog as though he could read the other's thoughts. As he nears the edge of the cover his style changes. The smooth gallop slows to a steady trot which presently alters to a majestic march. Higher and higher rises the square muzzle and up and up and up goes the tapering stern, while he steps ahead as though treading on tacks. Two yards from the cover he halts with lifted foot in the perfection of the old-fashioned stylish point. 'You beauty!' says the man, his eyes flashing with delight. Then he goes to the wonderful white form which, hard from set muscles, yet quivers with the tenseness of sudden excitement. The man, too, feels the magic of the situation. His eyes gleam and his teeth grip the pipe-stem as if they would shear it off. His heart thrills with rapturous anticipation and his strong hands grip the gun ready for instant action. Right well he knows that the pointer never draws like that or raises head and stern so high except for serious business. A dead leaf falls ticking through the tangling twigs, and at the first move of it the dog gives a convulsive twitch, while the gun flashes to the level and down again. A smile flickers in the keen eyes as the man moves a step nearer. No matter which way the game may go, he is bound to have a fair chance and he knows it. The cover is none too thick for even a straight-away drive, while all other directions mean the broad open. He clucks softly to the dog, but there is no responsive move — clearly this is a serious case. Could it possibly be a ——? Ah! the roar of him, as he tore like a feathered shell through the densest growth! Oh! the beauty of him, as he curved into the mellow sunshine, his dainty crest and plumes flattened with speed. And, ho! the smashing thump of him as he hit the ground some thirty yards away. 'Twas a brave dash, Sir Ruffs, but risky withal, to dare that sunny open in defiance of trained eyes and nervously quick hands. Was it yonder mat of new clover-tips, or the red fruit of the brier-rose, which coaxed you here a fourth of a mile from your woodland stronghold?

But the dog is eager to be off. The languid air, scarce drifting in its lazy mood, is tattling something. There is some unfinished business, which the strong scent of the expected grouse had interrupted. Now, as the dog slants away, the square muzzle rises higher, and the eager stern whips frantically. Shorter and shorter grow the tacks, until the advance steadies to a straight line. Soon the gallop slows to a canter, a trot, a stately walk. With head and stern held high, on he marches until fifty yards have been covered. Then he suddenly stiffens, while the quivering nostrils search the air for positive proof. His erstwhile gusty breathing is muffled now, his jaws slowly open and close, while the marvellous nose seems to be feeling — feeling for a something rarely pleasant. Then on again, slower and slower, till he seems to fairly drift to his anchorage. Then his hind-quarters sink till he is almost on his hams.

Has he got them? Man, if you'd ever followed that dog, you'd know he had 'em. When you see that long draw and the squatting finish, bet your gun, or your wife, or whatever you prize most, that it's a bevy and a big one. Scattered birds he will pin in all sorts of fancy attitudes as he happens upon them, but when he gets right down to it, that signifies a wholesale order. The man moves up within a foot of the stiffened stern. For a moment the tenseness is dramatic — then — whur-r-r! Something like a mighty shell loaded with feathered baseballs appears to explode in a patch of dried grasses, and the air is filled with humming missiles. Even in the roar and electric rush the trained eyes mark slight differences in coloration, and the trim tubes swing from one bird to a second with a smooth rapidity which betokens years of practice. Two birds fall a few yards apart, and as they turn over in the air, the man notes the flash of white and knows his lightning choice has been correct. As he moves toward them, there is a sudden hollow roar, and a lone bird rises from his very foot and goes whizzing toward cover. The gun leaps to shoulder before he can check it, but it is promptly lowered. 'Go on, you old seed-hen, and do your best next year,' he chuckles, as the brown matron strives to set herself afire by atmospheric friction. Her course is wide of that taken by the brood, but he knows she'll call the stragglers to her ere the shadows fall.

And they will be stragglers. Of the twenty strong beauties that roared up ahead of that first point, her sweet, insistent 'Ca-loi-ee! ca-loi-ee!' will muster but four when fence and thicket blur together in the scented dusk. Instead of doing as she had told them time and time again — instead of plunging headlong into the convenient woods, her headstrong family has whirred across the open and dropped here and there in the well-known resort, the railroad ditch. Hither they have come day after day until the awful, clattering trains have lost all terrors. In the broad ditch are pleasant runways and much useful gravel of assorted sizes, also cosey, sunny spots, the perfection of dust baths. Here, too, are many unaccountable stores of grain, choicest of corn and wheat, which seem in some miraculous manner to appear there all ready for eating. What better place could there be?

The man looks at the dog and grins with unholy joy. The dog looks at the man and seems to understand. Oh! they are a precious pair of rascals, are these two.

'You old Judas,' says the man, 'we'll do things to 'em now. It looks like fifteen straight — eh?'

And the dog cuts a couple of fool-capers, which is his method of evincing a devilish approval. Then the pair of 'em move on after the misguided birds.

Whur! Bing! Whur! Bing! It is almost too easy. Shooting in that ditch where cover is barely knee-high with a high embankment on one side and a stiff fence on the other, is something like shooting into an enormous funnel — the shot has to go right. The dog does little more than trot from point to point. Bird after bird rises and is cut down with painless exactitude. Presently two start together, only to be dropped by a quick double-hail. Then one curves over the fence, but a rising mist of downy feathers tells that he got it just in time. Then another pair, and as the second barrel sounds, a third rises. The cases leap from the gun, a hand flashes to and from a pocket — Burr!

'Here's where we quit — that makes fifteen,' says the man as the last bird is gathered. He sits down on a convenient knoll, pushes his hat back, and grins at the dog. That worthy, after a hesitating forward movement, which would indicate his belief that 'There's more,' also sits down and stares expectantly at the grimy coat. 'Yes, I'll give you half. You've done mighty well, and for once it's fifteen straight,' chuckles the man as he produces the sandwiches. The dog gets a bit more than half, for this is a red-letter day. Then the pipe comes out, and for half an hour the pair of 'em lounge in perfect peace. Little do they know or care about trouble. Twin tramps are they, heedless of the burdens of life, careless of its future. Sufficient for them that the afternoon sun is warm, the grass thick and dry. Naught care they for the five-mile homeward trudge, for neither is more than comfortably tired, and when they rise refreshed they will stride away as though they had just begun.

And the little woman will have two glorious meals all ready, for she knows what each can do in that line when thoroughly in earnest. And she will be almost sinfully happy, for the first glance will tell that things have gone well for at least one November day.

XIII

THE SERENE DUCK HUNTER

Grover Cleveland

1907

In the estimation of many people, all those who for any purpose or in any manner hunt ducks are grouped together and indiscriminately called duck hunters. This is a very superficial way of dealing with an important subject. In point of fact, the objects of duck shooting and its methods of enjoyment are so various, and the disposition and personal characteristics of those who engage in it present such strong contrasts, that a recognition of their differences should suggest the subdivision of this group into distinct and well-defined sections. Such a subdivision would undoubtedly promote fairness and justice, and lead to a better understanding of the general topic.

There are those whose only claim to a place among duck hunters is based upon the fact that they shoot ducks for the market. No duck is safe from their pursuit in any place, either by day or night. Not a particle of sportsmanlike spirit enters into this pursuit, and the idea never enters their minds that a duck has any rights that a hunter is bound to respect. The killing they do amounts to bald assassination — to murder for

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THE WILDFOWLER
From an etching by Frank W. Benson

the sake of money. All fair-minded men must agree that duck hunters of this sort should be segregated from all others and placed in a section by themselves. They are the market shooters.

There are others claiming a place in the duck-shooting group, who, though not so murderously inclined as the market shooters, have such peculiar traits and such distinctive habits of thought and action, as abundantly justify placing them also in a classification of their own. These are the hunters who rarely miss a duck, but whose deadly aim affords the gratification only in so far as it is a prelude to duck mortality, and who are happy or discontented as their heap of dead is large or small. They have smothered the keen delights of imagination which should be the cheering concomitants of the reputable game of duck hunting, and have surrendered its pleasures to actual results and the force of external circumstances. Their stories of inordinate killing are frequently heard, and often enliven the pages of sporting magazines. There can be but little doubt that this contingent give unintentional support to a popular belief, originating in the marked shooters' operations, that duck shooting is a relentlessly bloody affair. These are the dead shots among duck hunters.

The danger that all those who essay to shoot ducks may, by the conduct of these two classes, acquire a general and unmitigated reputation for persistent slaughter, cannot be contemplated without sadness. It is therefore not particularly reassuring to recall the fact that our countrymen seem just now to be especially attracted by the recital of incidents that involve killing, — whether it be the killing of men or any other living thing.

It is quite probable that the aggregation of all duck hunters in one general group cannot be at once remedied; and the expectation can hardly be entertained that any sub-classification now proposed will gain the acceptance and notoriety necessary for the immediate exoneration of those included within this group who are not in the least responsible for the sordid and sanguinary behavior of either the market shooter or the dead shot. These innocent ones comprise an undoubted majority of all duck hunters; and their common tastes and enjoyments, as well as their identical conceptions of duty and obligation, have drawn them together in delightful fraternity. By their moderate destruction of duck life they so modify the killing done by those belonging to the classes already described, that the aggregate, when distributed among the entire body of duck hunters, is relieved from the appearance of bloodthirsty carnage; and they in every way exert a wholesome influence in the direction of securing a place for duck hunting among recreations which are rational, exhilarating and only moderately fatal.

It must be frankly confessed that the members of this fraternity cannot claim the ability to kill ducks as often as is required by the highest averages. This, however, does not in the least disturb their serenity. Their compensations are ample. They are saved from the sordid and hardening effects induced by habitual killing, and find pleasure in the cultivation of the more delicate and elevating susceptibilities which ducking environments should invite. Under the influence of these susceptibilities there is developed a pleasing and innocent self-deception, which induces the belief on the part of those with whom it has lodgment, that both abundant shooting skill and a thorough familiarity with all that pertains to the theory of duck hunting are entirely in their possession and control. They are also led to the stimulation of reciprocal credulity which seasons and makes digestible tales of ducking adventure. Nor does bloody activity distract their attention from their obligations to each other as members of their especial brotherhood, or cause them to overlook the rule which requires them to stand solidly together in the promotion and protection, at all hazards, of the shooting reputation of every one of their associates. These may well be called the Serene Duck Hunters.

All that has been thus far written may properly be regarded as merely an introduction to a description, somewhat in detail, of the manner in which these representatives of the best and most attractive type of duck hunters enjoy their favorite recreation.

A common and easy illustration of their indulgence of the sentimental enjoyments available to them is presented when members of the fraternity in the comfortable surroundings of camp undertake the discussion of the merits of guns and ammunition. The impressiveness with which guns are put to the shoulder with a view of discovering how they 'come up,' the comments on the length and 'drop' of the different stocks, the solemn look through the barrel from the opened breech, and the suggestion of slight 'pitting,' are intensely interesting and gratifying to all concerned.

When these things are supplemented by an exchange of opinions concerning ammunition, a large contribution is added to the entertainment of the party. Such words as Schultze, Blue Ribbon, Dupont, Ballistite and Hazard are rolled like sweet morsels under the tongue. Each of the company declares his choice of powder and warmly defends its superiority, each announces the number of drams that a ducking cartridge should contain, and each declares his clear conviction touching the size of shot, and the amount, in ounces, and fractions of ounces, that should constitute an effective load.

Undoubtedly the enjoyment supplied by such a discussion is keen and exhilarating. That it has the advantage of ease and convenience in its favor, is indicated by the fact that its effects are none the less real and penetrating in the entire absence of any knowledge of the topics discussed. To the serene duck hunter the pretense of knowledge or information is sufficient. The important factors in the affair are that each should have his turn and should be attentively heard in his exploitation of that which he thinks he knows.

There is nothing in all this that can furnish reasonable ground for reproach or criticism. If under the sanction of harmless self-deception and pretense this duck-hunting contingent, to whom duck killing is not inevitably available, are content to look for enjoyment among the things more or less intimately related to it, it is quite their own affair. At any rate it is sufficient to say that they have joined the serene brotherhood for their pastime, and that any outside dictation or criticism of the mode in which they innocently enjoy their privileges of membership savors of gross impertinence.

There comes a time, however, when the calm and easy enjoyments of in-door comfort must give way to sterner activities, and when even the serene duck hunter must face the discomfort of severe weather and the responsibility of flying ducks. This exigency brings with it new duties and new objects of endeavor; but the principles which are characteristic of the fraternity are of universal application. Therefore our serene duck hunter should go forth resolved to accomplish the best results within his reach, but doubly resolved that in this new phase of his enjoyment he will betray no ignorance of any detail, and that he will fully avail himself of the rule unreservedly recognized in the brotherhood, which permits him to claim that every duck at which his gun is fired is his — except in rare cases of conceded missing, when an excuse should be always ready, absolutely excluding any suggestion of bad shooting. And by way of showing his familiarity with the affair in hand it is not at all amiss for him to give some directions as he enters his blind as to the arrangement of the decoys.

It is quite likely that his first opportunity to shoot will be presented when a single duck hovers over the decoys, and as it poises itself offers as easy a target as if sitting on a fence. Our hunter's gun is coolly and gracefully raised, and simultaneously with its discharge the duck falls helplessly into the water. This is a situation that calls for no word to be spoken. Merely a self-satisfied and an almost indifferent expression of countenance should indicate that only the expected has happened, and that duck killing is to be the order of the day.

Perhaps after a reasonable wait, another venturesome duck will enter the zone of danger and pass with steady flight over the decoys easily within shooting distance. Again the gun of our serene hunter gives voice, summoning the bird to instant death. To an impartial observer, however, such a course would not seem to be in accordance with the duck's arrangements. This is plainly indicated by such an acceleration of flight as would naturally follow the noise of the gun's discharge and the whistling of the shot in the rear of the expected victim.

This is the moment when the man behind the gun should rise to the occasion, and under the rule governing the case should without the least delay or hesitation insist that the duck is hit. This may be done by the use of one of several exclamations — all having the sanction of precedent and long use. One which is quite clear and emphatic is to the effect that the fleeing duck is 'lead ballasted,' another easily understood is that it has 'got a dose,' and still another of no uncertain meaning, that it is 'full of shot.' Whatever particular formula is used, it should at once be followed by a decided command to the guide in attendance to watch the disappearing bird and mark where it falls.

The fact should be here mentioned that the complete enjoyment of this proceeding depends largely upon the tact and intelligence of the guide. If with these he has a due appreciation of his responsibility as an adjunct to the sport, and is also in proper accord with his principle, he will give ready support to the claim that the duck is mortally wounded, at the same time shrewdly and with apparent depression suggesting the improbability of recovering the slain.

If as the hours wear away this process becomes so monotonous as to be fatiguing, a restful variety may be introduced by guardedly acknowledging an occasional miss, and bringing into play the excuses and explanations appropriate to such altered conditions. A very useful way of accounting for a shot missed is by the suggestion that through a slightly erroneous calculation of distance the duck was out of range when the shot was fired. A very frequent and rather gratifying pretext for avoiding chagrin in case of a long shot missed is found in the claim that, though the sound of shot striking the bird is distinctly heard, their penetration is ineffective. Sometimes failure is attributed to the towering or turning of the duck at the instant of the gun's discharge. It is at times useful to impute failure to the probability that the particular cartridge was stale and weak; and when all these are inadmissible, the small size of the shot and the faulty quality or quantity of powder they contain, may be made to do service; and in extreme cases, their entire construction as well as their constructor may be roundly cursed as causes for a miscarriage of fatal results.

When the ducks have ceased to fly for the day the serene duck hunter returns to camp in a tranquil, satisfied frame of mind befitting his fraternity membership. He has several ducks actually in hand, and he has fully enjoyed the self-deception and pretense which have led him to the belief that he has shot well. His few confessed misses are all satisfactorily accounted for; and he is too well broken to the vicissitudes of duck shooting, and too old a hunter, to be cast down by the bad fortune which has thickly scattered, over distant waters and marshes, his unrecovered dead.

When at the close of such a day a party of serene duck hunters are gathered together, a common fund of adventure is made up. Each as he contributes his share is entitled to add such embellishments of the imagination as will make his recital most interesting to his associates and gratifying to himself; and a law tacitly adopted but universally recognized by the company binds them all to an unquestioning acceptance of the truth of every narration. The successes of the day as well as its incidents of hard luck, and every excuse and explanation in mitigation of small returns of game, as they are rehearsed, create lively interest and quiet enjoyment. The one thing that might be a discordant note would be a hint or confession of downright and inexcusably bad shooting.

In this delightful assemblage of serene duck hunters there is no place for envious feeling toward either the slaughtering market shooter or the insatiable dead shot. They only seek, in their own mild and gentle way, the indulgence of the pleasures which the less bloody phases of duck hunting afford; and no censorious critic has the right to demand their enjoyment should be marred or diminished by the exactions of veracity or self-abasement.

Reference has already been made to the scrupulous care of this fraternity for the promotion and preservation, at all hazards, of the shooting reputation of all the associates. This is a most important duty. Indeed, it may be reasonably feared that any neglect or faltering in its discharge would undermine the entire fabric of the serene brotherhood's renown. The outside world should never gain from any of its members the least hint that a weak spot has been developed in the shooting ability of any of their number; and in giving an account of hunting results it is quite within bounds for them to include in the aggregate, not only the ducks actually killed and those reported killed, but those probably killed and never recovered nor reported. The fact that such an aggregate has been reported by an associate should impart to every member absolute verity, and each should make the statement his own, to the displacement of all other knowledge. Such ready support of each other's allegations and such entire self-abnegation are absolutely necessary if the safety of the organization is to be insured, and if its success and usefulness are to endure.

Thus the great body of serene duck hunters, who have associated together for the promotion of high aims and purposes, pursue the even tenor of their way. They do not clamor for noisy recognition or make cheap exhibition of their virtues. They will, however, steadily and unostentatiously persevere, both by precept and practice in their mission to make all duck hunters better and happier, and to mitigate the harsh and bloody features of duck hunting.

XIV

DE SHOOTIN'EST GENT'MAN!

Nash Buckingham

1916

Supper was a delicious memory! In the matter of a certain goose stew Aun' Molly had fairly outdone herself, and we, in turn, had jolly well done her out of practically all the goose. At this juncture it may not come amiss to digress and frankly explain the entire transaction with reference to said goose. Its breast had been detached, lightly grilled and then sliced into ordinary mouth-sized portions. The remainder of the now disfigured bird — back, limbs, and all parts of the first part thereunto appertaining — had been placed in an iron pot. Keeping company therein with the martyred waterfowl, in due proportion of culinary wizardry, were sundry bell peppers, two cans of mock turtle soup, diced roast pork, ham rinds, peas, potatoes, corn, okra, a soupçon of garlic and pretty much anything and everything else that wasn't tied down, or that Molly had lying loose around her kitchen. This stew was served right royally, attended by outriders of toasted pone bread and flanked by a man-at-arms in the form of an onion-flavored brown gravy sauce. I recall that there was a broiled teal and some country puddin' with ginger pour-over, but I merely mention these in passing.

And so the Judge and I, in rare good humor (I forgot to add that there had been a bottle of the former's famous port) as becomes sportsmen blessed with a perfect day's duck shooting, had discussed each individual bird killed, and the reason why, pro and con, an unmistakably large number had escaped unscathed. We bordered upon that indecisive moment when bedtime should be imminent were it not for the delightful trouble of getting started in that direction. As I recollect it, ruminating upon our delicious repast, the Judge had just countered upon my remark that I had never yet gotten enough hot turkey hash and beaten biscuit, by stating decisively that his craving for smothered quail still remained inviolate, when the door opened and in stepped 'Ho'ace'! He had come, following a custom of years, to take final breakfast instructions before packing the coals in Steamboat Bill, the stove, and dousing our 'glim.'

Seeing upon the center table, 'twixt the Judge and me, a bottle and the unmistakable tools and ingredients for my old friend's ironclad rule of the hunter's nightcap, Ho'ace paused in embarrassed hesitation and seated himself quickly upon an empty shell case. His attitude was a cross between that of the timid gazelle in the presence of danger and a wary hunter sighting game and effacing himself gently from the landscape. Long experience in the imperative issue of securing an invitation to get 'his'n' had taught Ho'ace that it were ever best to appear disinterested and thoroughly foreign to the subject until negotiations were opened directly with him later — much later. With the old-time members of the club he steered along the lines laid out above, but with new ones and the uninitiated he believed in quick campaigning. The Judge, reaching for the sugar bowl, mixed his sweetened water with adroit twirl and careful scrutiny as to degree, fastening upon the humble Ho'ace meanwhile a look of melting and liquid mercy. In a twinkling, however, his humor changed and the darkey found himself in the glare of a forbidding menace which would have done credit, in his palmiest days, to the Mister Chief Justice Jeffries himself.

'Ho'ace,' demanded the Judge, tilting into his now ready receptacle a gurgling, man's size libation, 'who is the best shot — the best duck shot you have paddled on this lake — barring, of course, a-h-e-mmm, myself?' The Judge surveyed himself like a coy juvenile, stirred his now thoroughly beaded toddy dreamily, and awaited the encore.

Ho'ace squirmed a bit as the closing words of the Judge's question struck home with appalling menace upon his ear. He plucked nervously at his battered head-piece. His eyes, exhibiting a vast expanse of white, roamed the pictured walls and smoke-dimmed ceiling in furtive, reflective, helpless quandary. Then, speaking slowly and gradually warming to his subject, he fashioned the following alibi:

'Jedge, y'know, suh, we all has ouh good days an' ouh bad days wid de ducks. Yes, my Lawdy — we sho' do! Dey's times whin de ducks flies all ovah ev'ything an' ev'ybody, an' still we kaint none o' us hit nuthin' — lak me an' you wuz, Jedge, down in de souf-end trails dis mawnin'.'

At this juncture the Judge interrupted to remind Ho'ace severely that he meant when the Judge, not the Judge and Ho'ace, was shooting.

'An' den dey's times whin hit look lak dey ain't no shot too hard nur nary duck too far not to be kilt. But, Mistah Buckin'ham yonder — Mistah Nash — he brung down de shootin'est gent'man what took all de cake. Hits lots o' de members huah whut's darin' shooters but dat fren' o' Mistah Nash's — uummpphh uummpphh — doan never talk to me 'bout him whar de ducks kin hear, 'caus' dey'll leave de lake ef dey hears he's even comin' dis way.

'Dat gent'man rode dis nigger jes' lak I wuz er saddle an' he done had on spurs. Mistah Nash he brung him on down heah an' say, "Ho'ace," he say, "heah's a gent'man from Englan'," he say, "Mistah Money — Mistah Harol' Money" — an' say, "I want you to paddle him t'morrow an' see dat he gits er fine shoot — unnerstan'?" I say, "Yas, suh, Mistah Nash," I say. "Dat I'll sho'ly do, suh; Mistah Money gwi' hav' er fine shoot ef I has ter see dat he do. But kin he hit 'em suh?"

'Mistah Nash he say, "Uh-why-uh-yas, Ho'ace, Mistah Money he's uh ve'y fair shot — 'bout lak Mistah Joyner or Mistah Hal Howard." I say to m'se'f, I say, "uummpphh, huummpphh, w-e-l-l-huah, now, ef dat's de case me an' Mistah Money gwi' do some shootin' in de mawnin'."

'Mistah Money he talk so kin'er queer an' brief lak, dat I hadda pay mighty clos' inspection t' what he all de time sayin'. But nex mawnin', whin me an' him go out in de boat, I seen he had a great big ole happy bottle o' Brooklyn Handicap in dat shell box an' I say to m'se'f ag'in, I say — "W-e-l-l! Me an' Mistah Money gwi' git erlong, someway."

'I paddles him on up de lake an' he say to me, he say, "Hawrice — uh — have yo' — er got any wager," he say, "or proposition to mek me as to regards wid," he say, "shootin' those elusive wil' fowls?" he say.

'I kinder studies a minit, 'caus' he talk so brief, den I says, "I guess you is right 'bout dat, suh!"

'He says, "Do you follow me, Hawrice, or is I alone?" he say.

'I says, "Naw, suh, Mistah Money, I'm right here wid you in de boat."

'"You have no proposition to mek me, den?" he say.

'S' I, "Naw, suh, boss, I leaves all dat to you, suh, trustin' in yo' gin'rosity, suh."

'"Ve'y good, Hawrice," he say. "I sees yo' doan grasp de principle. Now I will mek you a proposition," he say. I jes' kep on paddlin'. He say, "Ev'y time I miss a duck you gits a drink from this heah bottle — ev'y time I kills a duck I gits de drink. Which is it? Come, come, speak up, my man!"

'I didn' b'lieve I done heard Mistah Money rightly an' I says — uh, "Mistah Money," I says, "suh, does you mean dat I kin hav' de choice whedder you misses or kills ev'y time an' gits er drink?"

'He say, "Dat's my defi," he say.

'I say, "W-e-l-l — den, ef dat's de case, I gwi' — gwi' choose ev'ytime yo' misses, suh."

'Den I say to m'se'f, "Ho'ace, righ heah wha' you gotta be keerful, 'ginst you fall outa de boat an' git fired from de Lodge; 'caus' ef yo' gits er drink ev'ytime dis gent'man misses, an' he shoot lak Mistah Hal Howard, you an' him gwi' drink er worl' o' liquah — uh worl' o' liquah!"

'I push on up nurly to de Han'werker stan' an' I peeks in back by dat little pocket what shaller offen' de lak, an' I sees some sev'ul blackjacks — four on 'em — settin' in dar. Dey done seen us, too, an' up come dey haids. I see 'em twis'n' an' turnin' gittin' ready to pull dey freight frum dere. I says, "Mistah Money," I says, "yawnder sets some ducks. Look out, now, suh, 'caus' dey gwi' try to rush on pas' whin dey come outa dat pocket." Den I think, "Well, heah whar I knock de gol' fillin' outa de mouf uv Mistah Money's bottle."

'I raise up de lid o' de shell box an' see de bottle still dar. I say, "Uummpphh, hhuummpphh!" Jus' 'bout dat time up go dem blackhaids an' out dey come — dey did — flyin' low to de watah an' sorter raisin' lak — y'know, Jedge?

'Mistah Money he jus' pick up dat fas' feedin' gun — 'twar er pump, not one o' dese heah afromatics — an' whin he did I done reach foh de bottle, 'caus' I jest natcherlly knowed my time had done come.

'Mistah Money he swing down on dem bullies, "Ker-py-ker-py, powie-powie, splamp-splamp-splamp-splamsh" — Lawd-er-mussy, gent'mens — fou' times — right in de same place sounded lak — an' de las' duck fell "ker-flop" almos' in de boat.

'I done let go de bottle an' Mistah Money say — mighty cool like — say — "Hawrice, kin'ly to examin' dat las' chap clos'ly," he say, "an' obsurve," he say, "efn he ain' shot thru' de haid."

'I rake in dat blackjack an' sho' 'nuff, bofe eyes done shot right on out. Mistah Money say, "I was — er — slightly afraid," he say, "that I had done struck that fellah a trifle too far to win'ward," he say. "A ve'y fair start, Hawrice," he say. "You had bettah place me in my station, so that we may continue on wid'out interruption," he say.

'"Yas, suh," I says, "I'm right on my way dar now," an' I say to m'se'f, I say, "Mek hase, nigger, an' put dis huah gent'man in de bline an' giv' him er chance to miss er duck." I didn' hones'ly b'lieve but whut him killin' all fou' o' dem ducks so pert lak wuz er sorter accident. So I put him in de Han'werker bline. He seen I still had de shell bucket an' de liquah but he nuver said nuthin'. I put out de decoys an' den creep back wid de boat into de willers to watch.

'Pretty soon heah come er ole drake flyin' mighty high. Ouh ole hen bird 'coy she holler to him an' de drake he sorter twis' his haid an' look down. I warn't figurin' nuthin' but whut Mistah Money 'gwin let dat drake circle an' decoy — but, aw! aw! All uv er sudden he jus' raise up sharp lak an "Ker-powie!" Dat ole drake jus' throw his haid onto his back an' ride on down — look to me lak he fell er mile, an' whin he hit he th'owed watah er mile high, too.

'Mistah Money nuver say er word — jus' sot dar!

'Heah come another drake — way off to de lef' — up over back o' me. He turn roun' quick — he did — an' — "Kerzowie," he cut him down. De drake fall 'way back in de willers an' co'se I hadda' wade after 'im.

'Whilst I wuz gone Mistah Money shoot twice an' whin I come stumblin' back dar laid two ducks wid dey feets in de air. Befo' I hav' time t' crawl back in de boat he done knock down er hen way off in de willers agin'.

'I say, "Mistah Money, suh," I say, "I hev hunted behine lots o' far-knockin' guns an' I'se er willin' nigger, sho', but ef you doan please, suh, kill dem ducks closer lak, you gwi' kill ho' nigger Ho'ace in de mud." He say, "Dat's all right 'bout dat," he say. "Go git de bird — he kain't git away 'caus' he daid as er wedge."

'Whin I crawl back to de boat dat las' time it done mighty cole. Me in one en' o' de boat shiverin' an' dat big ole gol' headed bottle in de other en'. Might jus' as well ben ten miles so far ez my chances had done gone.

'Five mo' ducks come in — three singles an' er pair o' sprigs — an' Mistah Money chewed 'em all up jus' lak good eatin'. One time, tho' he had to shoot one o' dem high climin' sprigs twice an' I done got half way in de boat reachin' fer de bottle — but de las' shot got 'im. Aftah erwhile Mistah Money say, "Hawrice," he say, "how is you hittin' off, my man?"

'"Mistah Money," I say, "I'm pow'ful cole, suh, an' ef yo' wants 'er 'umble, no-count nigger to tell you de trufe, suh, I b'lieve I done made er pow'ful bad bet."

'He say, "Possibly so, Hawrice, possibly so!" But dat didn' git me nuthin'.

'Jedge, you know dat gent'man set dar an' kill ev'y duck dat come in an' had his limit long befo' de eight o'clock train run. I done gone to watchin' en' de las' duck dat come by wuz one o' dem lightnin' express teals. Heah he come, look lak somebody done blown er buckshot pas' him. I raise up an' holler, "Fly fas', ole teal, do yo' bes', 'caus' Ho'ace needs er drink!" But Mistah Money just jump up an' th'owed him forty feet skippin' 'long de watah. I say, "Hole on, Mistah Money, hole on, Mistah Money, you done kilt de limit!"

'"I have, have I?"

'I say, "Yas, suh, an' you ain' bin long 'bout it, neither."

'He say, "What are you doin' gettin' so cole, then?"

'I say, "I s'pec's findin' out dat I done made dat bad bet had er lot to do wid de air."

'An' dar laid de liquah all de time — he nuver touched none — me neither. I paddle him on back to de house an' he come stalkin' on in heah, he did — never say nuthin' 'bout no drink. Finally he say, "Hawrice, get me a bucket o' cole watah."

'I say to m'se'f, I say, "W-e-l-l — ef he want er bucket o' watah, nigger, yo' gwi' see some drinkin' now."

'Whin I come in, Mistah Money took offn' all his clo'es an' step out onto de side po'ch an' say, "Th'ow that watah ovah me, Hawrice, I am lit'rully compel," he say, "to have my tub ev'y mawnin'."

'I sho' th'owed dat ice cole watah onto him wid all my heart an' soul. He jus' gasp and hollah and slap hisself. Den he had me to rub him wid er big rough towel. Come on heah, den, he did, an' made hisself comfort'ble in dat big rocker yonder — an' went to readin'. I come on in wid his shell bucket an' went to cleanin' his gun. I seen him kinder smilin' to hisself. After while he say, "Hawrice," he say, "you hav' los' yo' bet."

'I kinder hang my haid an' 'low, "Yas, suh, Mistah Money, I done said farewell to de liquah."

'He say, "Yo' admits, den, dat you hav' done los' fair an' square an' dat yo' re-lizes hit?"

'"Yas, suh."

'He say, "Yo' judgmint," he say, "wuz ve'y fair, considerin'," he say, "de great law uv av'rage, but circumstances," he say, "has done render de conclusion subjec' to de mighty whims o' chance."

'I say, "Yas, suh," ve'y mournful lak.

'He say, "In so far as realizin' on anything 'ceptin' the mercy o' de Cote you is absolutely 'non-est' — ey, my man?"

'I says, "Yas, suh, barrin' you' mercy, suh."

'Den he think er momen' an' say, "Verree good." Den he say, "Sence you acknowledge de corn an' admits dat you hav' done got grabbed," he say, "step up," he say, "an' git you a tumbler, an' po' yo'se'f er drink — po' er big one!"

'I never stop fer nuthin': I jus' got me er glass out de kitchen, an', Jedge, I sho' po'd me er big bait o' liquah — I po'd er whole sloo' o' liquah. Mistah Mone ysay, "Hawrice, de size o' yo' drink," he say, "is primus facius evidence," he say, "dat yo' gwi' spout er toas' in honor," he say, "o' d' occasion."

'I say, "Mistah Money, suh," I say, "all I got to say, suh, is dat yo' is de king-pin champeen duck shooter so far as I've done bin in dis life an' ve'y prob'ly as fur ez Ise likely to go, too. Now, suh, please, suh, tell me dis, is yo' ever missed er duck — anytime — anyhow?"

'He say, "Really, Hawrice," he say, "you embarrasses me," he say. "Hav' another drink. There is mo' in yo' system whut demands ett-rance," he say.

'I done po'd me another slug an' I say, "Mistah Money," I say, "does you ever expect t' miss another duck long ez yo' lives, suh?"

'He say, "Hawrice," he say, "you embarrass me," he say, "beyon' words, yo' ovahwhelms me," he say, — "git ta hell outa heah, befo' y'u gets us bofe drunk!"'

XV

THE EFTEST WAY

Ben Ames Williams

1926

THERE is a world of wise talk in Chet McAusland. He is a man by any ordinary standard past the fullness of life; yet few lives are as full as his of sane thought and sensible pleasure, and a philosophic refusal to be concerned with the useless utilities of living. He has moved through the world with his eyes open, contemplating, appraising and remembering. I know few men whose convictions are so solidly founded upon actuality. He believes the things he sees or hears or surely knows; toward all else is incredulous, or even controversially inclined. When his conclusions are unsound it is because his understanding does not embrace all aspects of the matter; or it is because of a curious trait of his: The lack of any sense of time as a flowing stream, the inability to remember that yesterday must be considered gone, to-day a matter altogether new.

For this habit of his mind allowance must be made, a discount must be charged. One learns that if Chet says a thing is true he means that it was, on one occasion which he witnessed, true; it is hard to convince him the times may change. For example: Once upon a time I appeared at the farm on the hill above Fraternity with a canoe strapped to the top of my car. With it we could explore hidden streams and marshy waters in the late September quest for duck. He misdoubted the wisdom of trusting ourselves to this canoe; gave his reason plain.

'There was an Indian once up at the pond,' he assured me bodingly, 'and his canoe tipped over not five rod from shore, and he got tangled in the grass and drowned right there. A good swimmer too. When they found him the grass had cut right into his arms and legs, he'd fought it so. That's what a canoe will do to you.'

I pointed out that this was years ago.

'Well, I paddled a birch-bark canoe once, on the river over at Frankfort, when I was a boy,' he insisted. 'And it ducked right out from under me and I near drowned.'

This, too, I urged, was ancient matter; nor relevant, since the canoe here upon my car was of prosaic wood and canvas, built for wear and for stability.

'Well,' he conceded at last, 'an old man told me once whenever you go out in a canoe just take a line and fasten yourself to it. Just a light line from the gunwale to your belt; and then if you tip out you've got that to hang onto. The wind nor the current can't carry it away before you come up.'

We agreed upon this compromise and later experience made him to some small extent tolerate our use of the craft, then tolerance waned, became enthusiasm, and one night when we were paddling toward the car with a black duck tucked in the bow he said over his shoulder:

'You know, with this canoe I can take you where you can get the best trout you ever saw. Next spring.'

We nosed beneath low-hanging alders, threaded a narrow channel where meadow grass overhung on either side; the sky was crimson, the day draining into the west.

'Where?' I asked softly, for the evening was still.

'You remember that cover down under the ridge where I showed you the grave of the Revolutionary soldier, when your father was with us last fall.' He knew I did; waited for no assent. 'There's a marsh below there that the brook runs through, and a pond — Moose Pond, they call it. A cow moose bogged there once and couldn't get out. All quaking bog it is, and a man can't cross only when it's froze up tight. But there's a spring hole in the brook. We can put the canoe in at the bridge and go down through, maybe two miles, right to it.'

Three black ducks, whistling downstream, towered to pass above our heads, their pinions beating; they slipped past and were gone like a thought, too swift for catching.

A muskrat slapped the water in the reach ahead of us, diving to safety there. 'Trout in the spring hole?' I asked.

'My cousin, Ned McAusland, went in there with a skiff,' Chet told me. 'He fished less'n two hours and he took out the finest string of trout ever carried into Union Village. Twenty-two of them, and the smallest one weighed over a pound. And we can go there next spring any day at all.'

Even though I knew his failing my blood faintly tingled. Yet — 'When was that?' I asked, and he replied straight-forwardly:

'It was in May; maybe the middle — no, more toward the end of May. I don't know but it was the first week in June, but I think it was toward the end of May, 1874 ——'

Thus it is not wise to build upon Chet's statements until you have pinned a date to them. He took me once to fish the

Fiscal Meadow; told of the glories of the trout there; walked me into the ground; left me limp, chafed and quivering rag of a man, in a tangle of swamp growth, while he pushed tirelessly on; came back to confess that the brook was changed. And when I asked, he said that it was twenty years since last he fished these waters.

I am wiser now; I ask him: 'When?' And, even if the dates be satisfactory, I do not always accept his wisdom without question. There is a world of wise talk in Chet, but you must winnow it for yourself, for some of it is not so wise.

In the matter, for instance, about to be set down, there will be many an opinion; there will be many to disagree with him, few who will openly agree. The tale is in its essence reprehensible; it must be presented with apologies; if it has a moral, each man may determine for himself. But there is, perhaps, somewhere a certain glamour in the matter; a certain glory; the glow and drumbeat of a courage, cool and quiet, of the sort called valorous.

On the whole, no doubt, a highly immoral tale, daring to suggest that sober and ascetic virtue may be, after all, but the weakness of a coward.

This introduction is devious and wandering and with no point at all, but many of Chet's tales are of this fashion. Sometimes, to assemble the whole matter, it is necessary to cast to and fro, selecting a passage here, a word there, an anecdote at noontime beside the brook, a dissertation at evening across the table; to gather all the rays of light that may illume the affair, and focus them, from their divergent sources, upon the current page. The fact that Chet lacks a sense of time has no real bearing on the story to be told, except that for Chet, though the thing extended over years, it stands as a single and related whole. Time is perhaps a unity of less importance than may be supposed. Or perhaps time is not a matter of minutes and hour and days, but of lives, of cycles, of empires and of ages without end. If that which we do at sixteen may determine that which we do at sixty, then perhaps there is no such thing as time at all; perhaps eternity is now.

However — having exposed the hollowness of the word, it can do no harm to use it — it is time to speak of Uncle Joe Deal.

One of the bonds between me and Chet is that we both have a sneaking liking for dogs. Whenever we foregather there are dogs about our heels, and whenever we talk together we speak of dogs, and whenever we talk about dogs soon or late Chet is sure to speak of Old Job — Old Job that was Old Tantrybogus. That tale has been written heretofore, and this was written there:

> A Rockland man came on October for the woodcock shooting. He and Chet found sport together and found — each in the other — a friend. The Rockland man had fetched with him a she dog of marvelous craft and from her next litter he sent a pup to Chet. In honor of the giver Chet called the dog Job.

The giver was Uncle Joe Deal, but when Chet named him to me at the time I paid no great heed; heard his name as Job instead of Joe. The name Job for the dog developed, it appeared, as a matter of euphony. The giver was Uncle Joe Deal.

Later, at odd times, I found that this man came more and more into Chet's talks with me. I knew they had been friends; but I came to know at length that for years they hunted together every fall, fished together in the brooks in spring and summer, even once went sea-bird shooting on the ledges at the mouth of the bay. While old Job was alive and Chet lived as a bachelor on the farm above the village, Uncle Joe Deal used to like to come and spend a day or two with him. If the season fitted, they hunted or fished; if not, they but sat and talked together, finding that rich pleasure only to be found in such grave and warm communion. And little by little there was built up in the background of my thoughts a picture of this Uncle Joe Deal.

He was older than Chet. Dead, I knew, some years agone, and an old man before he died. Chet always spoke of him as old, yet it appeared casually one day that he was not, in years, much older than Chet himself. He was, for instance, a boy of fifteen when he enlisted in the war of the 60's, and Chet at that time was near ten. And once I asked Chet why he always spoke of Uncle Joe as old, and Chet said doubtfully:

'Well, he'd lived hard.'

I had, by glimpses, some indication of the hardness of this living. Uncle Joe was a widower when Chet first came to know him, and it appeared that he was a drinking man. Chet told me, with some hilarity, of a certain day. Uncle Joe had come to gun for woodcock; they covered, during the afternoon, a wooded pasture, and when it was time to end for the day they stopped to see the farmer upon whose land they were, and to have a drink with him.

'Uncle Joe had a flask,' Chet explained, 'and he asked for a tin dipper, and he poured in about an inch of liquor in the bottom. White it was, like water, but it weren't gin. Whiskey, he called it. It looked like not more than one good drink he poured in, and then he put water in it and filled the dipper half up. A quart dipper it was.

'Then I had a drink, and Dave — he owned the farm — he had one, and Uncle Joe had one, and there was about half of it left, and I didn't want more, nor Uncle Joe, and Dave drunk it.

'And five minutes after, he was asleep, and he didn't wake up till morning. That was powerful stuff, whatever it was.'

'Whiskey?' I repeated.

'Uncle Joe called it whiskey,' he agreed reflectively.

Chet himself is not a drinking man. 'I used to,' he sometimes says. 'Before I come to the farm, when I was cutting granite in East Harbor, I used to spend my evenings in the old Pilgrim House bar. But I don't hardly touch it any more.' So I wondered a little how he and Uncle Joe spent their long evenings at the farm.

'Well, he'd have a little,' Chet conceded, 'and sometimes I'd take a drink with him.'

But Uncle Joe, he told me, was a steady and persistent drinker. 'Only it never seemed to make any difference in him,' he explained. 'He was a big man — big as you and bigger — and he'd get a little red, and maybe a little slower in the way he talked, but that was all. We'd sit here by the stove ——'

Chet was his own cook and housekeeper in those days. 'I used to fry up a batch of doughnuts,' he told me, 'and some biscuits. And I made my own butter. And there was salt pork and potatoes. We lived high, I tell you.'

And Uncle Joe would tell long tales, and their talk would wander through the coverts, gunning over the ground they had gunned that day or the day before or the year before, while Uncle Joe sat sipping at his fiery white potation.

'Some nights we'd play cribbage,' Chet explained. Uncle Joe was a card player. He loved every game of chance, and he taught Chet the science of the board and pegs. 'We kept count,' Chet assured me. 'Weren't ever either one of us more'n two or three games ahead of the other very long.'

'It's a game that evens up,' I agreed, and added rashly, 'Little or no skill to it. Stake a novice against an expert in a five-game match and the odds are even, nothing more.'

Chet fired at that; he discoursed upon the game; he explained its finer points to me. Uncle Joe was for the time forgotten in the hot zest and flavor of this argument. We turned at last to the board itself to settle the moot point, and Chet won four games out of five and was as immensely pleased as I was all chagrin.

'Uncle Joe was a first-rate hand at it,' he told me tolerantly, 'but I got to be as good as he was in the end.'

But there was that night no further talk of Uncle Joe. The hour drew on; it was time to be abed.

Yet at other times and seasons I heard more of the man — how one day he killed nine woodcocks and a partridge and never missed a shot.

'There were three of us gunning that day,' Chet explained, 'and he'd stand way out to one side, sixty yards off, and he never shot at a bird unless we'd shot and missed. And then he'd swing and drop them. Had an old ten-gauge gun, and he'd kill a ways that would astonish you.'

Or he would quote to me, when I had eagerly banged twice at a bird which was no least whit discomposed thereby, the advice of Uncle Joe.

'You shoot too quick,' Chet would say, 'Uncle Joe taught me; he'd say, over and over: "Thing to do, bring your gun up, get your aim, then count slow, one, two, three, shoot." And he'd get 'em near every time.'

He told me, more than once, the tale of Uncle Joe's breach with a neighbor, a man who may go unnamed. With this man Uncle Joe sometimes gunned.

'And this fellow,' Chet explained, 'he had a way, when they both shot about the same time, of going over and picking up the bird and putting it in his pocket. Finally Uncle Joe got mad. So one day they were standing right together and the dog had a point, and a woodcock jumped and they both threw down on him and neither one of them pulled, and the other man he says: "Why didn't you shoot?" And Uncle Joe said: "Jim, I'll tell you something: the next bird I shoot at I'm going to kill."

'And he did,' Chet assured me, 'and never gunned with the man again.' He hastened to add: 'But Uncle Joe was never one to claim a bird. Only you knew if he shot he hit it. He loved gunning, the old man did.'

Loved fishing, too, and was a fisherman of parts, it appeared. I thought Chet himself had almost a mystic mystery of the art, but Chet assured me that Uncle Joe could fish a pool which he himself had fished most diligently, and take fish of noble girth and powers in waters Chet would have sworn were dry. And Uncle Joe was a fox hunter, and he had a hound which he sometimes brought to the farm above the village; then he and Chet would start the dog on a track in the valley along the river, and sprint like younglings to their vantages, to wait for the long chance of a shot that sometimes came.

'It'd surprise you to see him get up the hill,' Chet told me, chuckling at the recollection, 'big as he was. He'd be red in the face and look like he was busting, but he got there just the same.'

A man, I came to see, who lived robustly; who found in life a gusto; who ate, drank and took his pleasures like the giants of old. A man in short, of whom it was necessary to disapprove.

The fare at the farm is hearty fare. Mrs. McAusland is a cook beyond comparison; her soda biscuits are a confection; her baked beans are an orgy; her salt pork fried in its own fat is delicious beyond imagining; her pies are as comforting as a caress; and there is a certain cake which she makes, of which the icing is compounded of cut raisins and sugar and the white of eggs and a little cream, which might have ruined Saint Anthony. Such viands are fit to make a man willing to swing a double-bitted ax all day, if only in order to create a vacuum which may be filled. Yet it is not necessary to swing an ax. One may tramp diligently through the coverts or along the brooks, and scant his luncheon, and thus persuade himself that it is meet and wise to eat his fill. This new sin of eating is not yet firmly seated on its throne; a casuistic conscience may yield a point at times.

But Chet, as a matter of fact, has no patience with such scruples at all; he is irritated by my occasional half-hearted abstinence.

'I've et all I wanted all my life,' he assures me, 'and it never hurt me any. I've lived on doughnuts and cheese and soda biscuits and butter. A man as big as you needs to eat. And you won't eat as much as me.'

This is scarce true. Chet is longer at his eating, because he has so many things to say, but the quantity he eats is small. I try to point this out to him, but he is a man not easy of convincing.

'Never did anyone any hurt to eat wholesome victuals,' he insists. 'Another piece of pie won't hurt you.'

Mrs. Mac sometimes takes my part. 'Let him alone, Chet,' she will say. 'He's et all he wants. He'll eat more if he wants to.'

But this is so manifestly untrue that I point out its falseness to her. 'No, no! I could eat everything in sight, and relish it, and beg for more. But if I did I'd weigh three hundred by Monday.'

'Sho!' says Chet. 'You're walking all day.'

'Well, I sat down now and then to smoke a pipe,' I confess, 'and I lay watching a trout in that pool by the bridge for an hour.'

It is an old quarrel, this, with no solution in sight, but it led at last to my hearing the end of the tale of Uncle Joe. So has its uses still.

I had been pointing out to Chet that the authorities advocate temperance; that a man may dig his grave with his teeth. I quoted to him this opinion and that and the other. He laughed scornfully enough.

'Sho!' he retorted. 'That's what the doctors used to tell Uncle Joe.'

'I should judge, from what you've said, he needed telling,' I commented.

'He never paid any heed to them,' Chet assured me. 'He used to play poker one night every week with some men in Rockland, and they had a bottle of whiskey apiece, and finished it before they quit, toward morning. That was the rule, a part of the game with them. And the doctors told them it'd kill them all. But Uncle Joe never paid them any heed. And up here he ate three times what you do.'

He hesitated a moment; and his tone changed, quickened a little as he swung into the tale. 'I mind,' he assured me, 'he told me once. It was when he first started coming up here. "Chet," he says to me, "sometime when we're out gunning together we'll get separated, and when you get back to the buggy I won't be there. Don't let it bother you, Chet." And I asked him what he meant, and he said he expected to die that way any time.

'"They tell me I will," he told me. "Like a birch leaf in the fall, breaking off and settling down on the ground. Without any noise at all, the way they do when the dew's on them."' And Chet added parenthetically: 'Uncle Joe was a great hand to put things in a queer way.'

He puffed at his pipe. 'It bothered me some,' he continued slowly. 'I liked Uncle Joe, and I used to tell him he'd ought to drink less, or none at all. But he said it wasn't just the drinking. He said they wanted him to stop that, but they wanted him to stop smoking, and they wanted him to stop eating, and to stop gunning and walking around. They said exertion might do it, or anything. He'd say: "They want I should set at home in a chair all day." And he'd shake his head at that, and he'd say: "Set ten years in a chair! I'd ruther gun one day and let the chair rock in the wind the next," he'd say.

'I talked to him and argued with him some,' Chet went on. 'It looked like to me it was common sense to try to live as long as he could, and I told him so. It struck me for a spell he was contrary, and I used to get kind of mad at him, but he'd smile at me the way he had and shake his head. And he'd tell me not to get excited. "It's nothing to bother you, Chet,' he'd say; "and I don't aim to let it bother me."'

He was still. Mrs. McAusland had come in from the kitchen, her dishes done; she said gently, 'I used to see him up here, before I married Chet. He was a man you couldn't help liking. It was a wonder the way he stuck at it, too. Where most men would ha' been in their beds.'

'Was he sick?' I asked, and Chet considered.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I don't know that you'd say he was real sick, unless he weren't ever well. But after a while he had something the matter with his leg. Fell on it and banged his knee and it stiffened up on him, and used to kind of drag that leg. I thought, first time I saw him after, that he couldn't get around at all, but he did. It would look like he wasn't making much progress, but he covered ground. Only I'd work the dogs and go into the covers, and he'd stay more out in the open ground, that was all. He would have it that we'd go gunning, and I couldn't make to talk him out of it, and after I see that he got around I didn't say any more.

'He was that way two — three years,' Chet assured me. 'And sometimes he hadn't hardly any feeling in his leg at all. And he used to say: "It'll still keep me up and get me around," he used to say. "And when it won't I'll get a wooden one that will. There's old stubs in the woods been standing a long time, Chet."'

Later, it appeared, Uncle Joe had some trouble with his eyes, and particularly with his left eye. Years of plunging through the birch and alder covers had tortured it sore; the sunlight glinting on the twigs, the twigs slapping at his face, the dust of dried bark, all these combined to produce a long-continued irritation. 'He got to wearing glasses,' Chet explained. 'And he had a time with them. The doctor gave him double-vision spectacles, and they'd slide down his nose so he couldn't see without throwing his head back; and finally he got another pair and he used to tie them on, but they didn't fit someway. He didn't shoot so good; got to missing birds that he would have killed. But he liked it just the same.'

I asked abruptly, 'What sort of looking man was he, Chet?' — trying to conjure him up before my eyes.

'Well,' Chet told me carefully, 'he was big. Must have weighed two hundred. And not very tall. Not much taller than me.

'And he used to wear an old, ragged gunning coat and long, loose pants. Black serge, I guess they had been. They kind of sagged around his shoes. Boots was too heavy for him, so he wore big shoes. And an old faded hat, and his gun over his arm. See him from behind and he looked kind of funny. Knock-kneed, and his legs fat, and one leg dragging, and them old pants of his. Only you couldn't help thinking he done well to get around at all.'

Added, something like contrition in his tone: 'I used to laugh, sometimes, watching him. It weren't so funny either, you might say. I never laughed so's he could see' — and sat a moment silent, and said thoughtfully: 'I liked Uncle Joe a lot. We had some good days together.' And again: 'He was a man that had ideas about things. And a way of talking.' And again: 'He did like gunning better than anything.' And after a further silence still: 'It was a sight that would astonish you, to see him get around, crippled, and half blind; and to hear the way he'd laugh. He liked gunning.' And finally: 'I set out to tell you ——'

So came to the ending of the tale.

It was, he said, the year after Old Tantrybogus had distemper and was still unfit for any strenuous work afield. Uncle Joe came up from Rockland to stay a day or two with Chet at the farm above the village. Season was late October; the woodcock flight was on.

Uncle Joe drove up in his buggy behind his slow old farm horse; and a three-year-old setter dog sat on the seat beside him, nosing the way, his nostrils quivering, saliva dripping from his eager jaws. This pup, successor in Uncle Joe's affections to the she dog which had mothered Old Tantrybogus, was called Don, and a good dog, Chet said. Well broken, easily handled, a slow worker and a close one. Uncle Joe would not permit him to retrieve, but Don was trained to find and point the dead bird. A black-and-white dog, his markings great splashes of glistening ebony against his gleaming coat.

'You could see him in the brush, four — five rod,' Chet told me, 'marked the way he was. Uncle Joe never used a bell on him at all.'

Uncle Joe's old ten-gauge gun lay in the bed of the buggy, half beneath the seat, in its battered case so frayed by usage that the stiff leather had become like velvet. The old man wore his gunning clothes; three or four boxes of shells were all his luggage. The day was fine and crisp and fair, with a sky like wine and a friendly sun, and the bright mosaic of late-autumn coloring upon the hills and in the valley of the river here below the farm. When the buggy turned into the farmyard and Chet went out from the kitchen Don leaped bounding to the ground, touched Chet's hand with his nose in swift greeting, and considered the case of three hens scratching by the pump shed with a half-concealed interest inherited from his puppy days. And Uncle Joe called:

'Chet, my boy, what a day!'

'Indian summer,' Chet assented. 'There'll be a frost tonight. The birds'll be on the dry knolls in the morning.'

'I tell you, Chet,' Uncle Joe cried, 'I've been singing to myself this last three miles. Even Don here has been whining like an old fool. A man forgets the way the hills can look, one year to another, seems to me.'

'I been gathering apples this afternoon,' Chet said, 'and watching the shadows over on the mountain, crossing there.'

'Any whitewash in your garden this morning?' Uncle Joe was out by now, Chet leading the horse to the barn.

'Two or three woodcock in there last night,' Chet assured him. 'They're everywhere.'

'A great day to-morrow, Chet.'

'We'll find birds,' Chet agreed.

Uncle Joe drew a brown parcel from beneath the seat. 'I brought some sausage,' he explained. 'We'll feast to-night and gun to-morrow. What's wrong with a world like that, Chet?'

And—'Not a thing,' Chet told him. 'Not a thing at all.' They were both warm with friendship, with the pleasure of this renewed companionship; they talked like boys of the great sport the next day would bring. And they cooked the sausage — loose sausage freshly ground — and Chet boiled potatoes and made pancakes and brought a flake of honey from the cellar, to serve instead of syrup; and they feasted together while Don sat at attention by his master's side and had his supper, too, and then slept on the rug beside the table. And sometimes as he dreamed his tail tap-tapped upon the floor. They sat late, and there was a well-filled glass at Uncle Joe's right hand and a broad beam of pleasure in his eyes.

Before sleep they went out to view the stars, serene and high, and to feel the low wind that blew soothingly. 'Not enough to keep it from freezing in the swamps and wet holes,' Uncle Joe opined, and they saw good promise for the coming day.

The morning was like the fulfillment of a pledge in measure bountiful. A rime of frost on the grass in the orchard at dawn; the still leaves falling in their festal garb; and the sky a blue that eased the eye. The horse was fed, and Don too. I wouldn't even scant a dog,' Uncle Joe used to say. 'And themselves finished the sausage and had fresh pancakes with honey, and coffee, but they ate not so long; were both afire to be afield. Chet wrapped biscuits for their nooning, and while the sun still hung low above the mountain to the east they turned the buggy toward the cover where their sport began. And forthwith struck birds.

This was one of those days of which the gunner dreams, when sky and wood and earth and the game combine to make all delight. Before they had crossed the first stone wall Don made game and brought a woodcock to stand, and Chet walked up on the bird and crumpled it as it topped the low birches on the knoll. Uncle Joe, outside the covert, waited to shoot if there were need.

'It was the way we'd gunned last two three years,' Chet explained. 'I'd walk up the birds and shoot them if I got a chance, and if I missed he'd pick them off with that old ten-gauge of his. Mighty few that ever got away. But I shot better than I knew how that day.'

At the end of an hour Chet had half a dozen birds and Uncle Joe had not pulled trigger, and Chet began to be ashamed. So when the next one whistled upward he held his fire, and heard Uncle Joe's gun roar and roar again, and then he heard the old man laugh aloud and call:

'Missed, by Harry! Missed him clean! What good's a man with glasses on?'

Laughed at his own failure. Said he must be getting old.

It was one of those days when, unaccountably, a woodcock may be seen upon the ground. There are such days, and there are other times when you know where the bird must be and look till your eyes ache without being able to discover his form against the background of the leaves, so cunningly his plumage blends against their browns. But now and then, for no reason, you see bird after bird. It is hardly possible for the dog to hold a point without your being able to discover the game there before his nose.

And this was such a day; the birds lay close; they would scarce be driven into flight. You could, if you moved near, stand still and watch their wonder there, and see their bright black eyes.

Chet saw the second bird he shot before it rose, and thereafter others. Toward noon Don got a point in the fringe of alders near where Uncle Joe was posted, and Uncle Joe called

Chet to come and see. Don was still as stone, and half a dozen feet from his nose the bird crouched, eyes alert, moving not at all.

'Ain't that a picture, now?' Uncle Joe cried. Chet nodded and filled his pipe, and Don held his point and the bird waited to see what was to come. Chet filled his pipe and looked about, and said almost regretfully:

'He's got to fly off in the open.'

'Watch him,' Uncle Joe bade. 'Watch his eye, Chet.'

These two loved gunning, but it was because they loved the coverts and the hillsides, the bright October days and the brown birds. They watched for minutes on end, and Don rolled his eyes on them reprovingly, wondering at this long delay, but held his point. And at length Uncle Joe went slowly forward, step by cautious step, till he was within one pace of the bird. He extended the barrel of his gun very slowly, and when it drew near the woodcock opened wide its beak, as though it would have bit the steel. And Uncle Joe burst into a delighted shout of laughter, and Chet too.

At the loud sound the woodcock rose; rose and hung like a ball of feathers on a string, and flew away, and neither lifted gun.

'Now wa'n't that comical?' Chet cried.

'I've seen 'em that way in nesting season,' Uncle Joe commented. 'Never this time of year.'

Don looked at them in some disgust, and with an affectation of indifference he scratched his side. And they went forward upon their business again.

There were other moments in that day. Once Don roaded a partridge through birches to a hemlock fringe with open ground beyond and pointed there and Chet, thinking to drive the bird into the open for more easy shooting, burst through the fringe past the pointing dog. But the partridge rose and beat up within arm's length of Chet's head, and back through the fringe and away, and they laughed together over this.

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IN THE ALDERS

From a drawing by A. L. Ripley reproduced in
'The Sportsman's Scrapbook,' 1928

'I could have shot him,' Uncle Joe confessed, 'but he was so clever, ducking back on you that way, I let him get away.'

A little later in an open birch growth another partridge rose wild to their right, and Uncle Joe fired so quickly Chet called: 'Did you get him?'

'Didn't even see him,' Uncle Joe confessed. 'If I got that bird it's as good a shot as I ever made. And I think I did.'

They found the bird, in fact, and Uncle Joe was immensely pleased. 'If I can nail 'em like that I'm not through yet,' he said exultantly, and Chet gave him full meed of praise, and the old man was as delighted as a child.

And again, following a wood road through a thick swamp they discovered Don was not at heel and went back and found him at point, standing in the very road.

'Caught the scent as he went by,' Uncle Joe pointed out, 'and never moved, except his head. That's a picture, Chet.'

'There's the bird,' Chet whispered, and they saw the woodcock squatting on the leaves, three feet away. Beyond him was thick cover — hemlock and spruce and cedar, with leafless alders all between. The odds were with the rising bird. When he did rise he flicked behind a hemlock, but Uncle Joe, following patiently his flight, caught a far flash of wing and fired, and Don found the bird a full forty yards from the road, stone dead.

'And that's a good shot, too,' said Uncle Joe.

There was fire in them, and youth and zeal, and they hunted diligently and they traveled far. The day drew on. The sun began to send more level rays dancing from the birch twigs toward their eyes. The farther hills were purple, deepening as the minutes drew away. So they came, toward the end of the day, to a covert covering many acres, on a lofty hilltop where an old farm once stood. There were many apple trees, some in the open, some half smothered in the creeping growth of the poplar and young birch, and from the open land the eye could sweep for miles. To reach the spot they had driven deep into the wood, and then climbed afoot the steep and arduous hillside; and Uncle Joe was heavy-footed with fatigue and had to rest awhile.

'Maybe we'd best not gun any more to-day,' Chet suggested. But the old man shook his head.

'I like to save this to the last,' he said. 'It's the best cover I know; rather gun it than any of them. I like to look off at the hills, and the birds are here, Chet — the birds are here.'

So, when he was rested, they worked Don through a clump of poplar saplings and stirred a partridge out and heard him wing far down into the run, through the thick growth. Chet, listening, said:

'He lit in a tree!'

'Heard him,' Uncle Joe agreed.

'I'm going after him,' Chet suggested. 'I've shot many a partridge that lit in a tree, creeping up on them, listening for them to whit-whit at me.'

'Go on,' the old man assented. 'I'll work Don up toward the wall.'

And so they parted there.

Chet turned downhill into the black growth, and for a hundred yards or so he went swiftly, and was very still. There was no air stirring. Above his head the topmost twigs were laced against the sky, motionless as though they were wild things affrighted by his presence there. He slowed his steps and began to listen, advancing by short stages, listening long between. His eyes scanned, bough by bough, the trees before him, seeking the hidden bird.

He knew it must be near; knew what to look for. A high, lean shape with head thrust upward like a stub, motionless as a stub might have been. And he looked and listened; listened for the low nervous call which would give warning before the bird should fly.

He scanned the wood, noting where there were open aisles through which a shot might be had, and he lost some sense of the swift pass of time.

He stopped at last, resolved to move no more. The partridge must be here, within gunshot now; would, if he waited, make its presence heard.

'And it seemed to me,' said Chet, 'I'd never known the woods to be so still. When a leaf come down it was like it thumped the ground, and I could hear a squirrel, or something, way down in the run twenty, thirty rod away.'

And then he heard the ten-gauge roar, once and then again; two shots, spaced not too close together, as though deliberation pointed them; somewhere behind him, up atop the hill. Unconsciously he turned his head and he heard the partridge burr away behind his back; swung too late to catch even a glimpse of its departing form.

While he was still looking after it a sudden wind came sweeping across the trees above his head, stirring their boughs so that they swayed and lifted like the arms of cheering men, like a gesture of farewell to a departing friend. 'A puff of wind from the south it was,' he said, 'and warmer. I could feel it, warm like spring. Only there was just this puff of it, and then the branches settling down again till they didn't move at all. And it got still.'

So he turned back to rejoin Uncle Joe, and by and by, when he was come to the top of the hill, he hallooed and had no reply. Moved on and hallooed again, and his heart began to pound as he advanced upon his way.

'There was a little clump of birch,' he explained. 'Good-size trees; and the sun struck through them kind of red on the white bark. There was an old apple tree in there, and a little wet hole, and there'd usually be woodcock there. I found him there.'

He saw Don before he saw Uncle Joe. Don was at point, rigid as stone, and Chet approached him and he saw the dog's eyes roll doubtfully to one side, and so discovered the old man where he lay.

'He was down kind of on his side,' Chet told me, 'like he'd fell on his face and rolled a little over. His gun was there beside him, and his right hand was out, and after a minute I see there was a dead bird right under his hand.'

A moment later he perceived that Don was still on point, and so was led to the discovery of another dead bird, half a dozen steps away.

'So I knew Uncle Joe had made a double,' he explained. 'There was a kind of a smile on his face; the way there always was when he'd made a good shot.'

Added: 'He did like gunning better than anything.'

And a moment later, clearing his throat, told me how he went down to lead the horse painfully up through the wood to the top of the hill.

'Don stayed there while I was gone,' he explained, 'and I guess the whole thing kind of satisfied Uncle Joe. He wanted it that way.'

SOME BOOKS ON AMERICAN SHOOTING

1783–1930

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SECTION I — 1783–1850

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